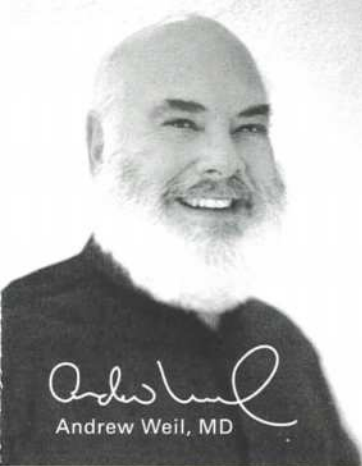




Dr. Andrew Weil's

JANUARY 2005

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

Preventing Lung Cancer in Women

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ON MY MIND:

Thyme Heals

I recently learned about essential oil of thyme from a naturopathic physician. Now I often recommend it for easing cold and flu symptoms, naturally.

HOW TO Add one-quarter teaspoon of thyme oil (available at health food stores and online) to a pot of hot water or a vaporizer. Inhale the steam. Do this a few times a day.

WHY TRY? Breathing in the warm steam can soothe inflamed sinuses and unclog nasal passages, and when you have a virus, adding oil of thyme—which has antibacterial properties—may reduce your risk of getting a secondary bacterial infection. Steam inhalation with thyme is also good for bronchitis: The herb helps loosen phlegm, making coughs more productive, and it eases bronchial spasms.

WHO KNEW? Thymol, an active ingredient in thyme oil, is also found in Listerine mouthwash and Vicks VapoRub. **SP**

Surprisingly, the biggest cancer threat to American women doesn't involve their breasts or ovaries, but their lungs. Last year, lung cancer killed as many women as breast and all gynecological cancers combined. While lung cancer rates for men have been slowly decreasing over the past several years, rates for women have actually risen. In fact, deaths from lung cancer in women have increased by 600 percent since 1930, as more women began to smoke. Although controversial, recent studies suggest women are more susceptible to lung cancer than men are.

While there's no consensus yet about why women are at increased risk for lung cancer, researchers have some intriguing ideas about its causes. One of the theories that I find most plausible implicates the female hormone estrogen. Studies show that lung cancer cells have more estrogen receptors on their surfaces than normal cells; women may be more vulnerable to this disease simply because they have much higher levels of estrogen than men. Plus, compared to male smokers, women who smoke appear to have more activity of a gene that makes the chemicals in cigarette smoke more harmful to cells. Once again, estrogen may be responsible for the difference.

Although more research is needed, there's much we do know about lung cancer prevention. I recommend the following steps:

Don't smoke. Since nearly 90 percent of lung cancer cases are due to smoking, the most important thing you can do to prevent the disease is to not smoke and to avoid people who do. Women appear to be more susceptible to the effects of cigarette smoke than men: It causes more damage to women's bodies, even when they smoke less or simply breathe in secondhand smoke.

Also, it seems to be harder for women to quit smoking, possibly because they tend to use this habit as a weight control tactic. Yet, most smokers gain fewer than 10 pounds after quitting, and eating sensibly and exercising

regularly should help head off this problem. Nicotine gum, patches, and other conventional products can all be useful in decreasing the desire to smoke, but I think they're most effective when used along with mind-body measures such as hypnosis, support groups, and relaxation techniques like meditation and yoga. (For more advice on quitting, see the December 2000 issue.)

Eat well. A diet that's high in antioxidant-rich produce can nourish your lungs; apples, tomatoes, and oranges appear especially protective. And there's good evidence that eating more carotenoids—pigments found in vegetables such as carrots, yellow squash, and dark leafy greens—may help prevent lung cancer. (While dietary carotenoids are fine, I advise against taking isolated beta-carotene supplements, especially if you're a current or former smoker. High doses of beta-carotene—33,000 IU or more per day—have been shown to increase the risk of lung cancer in smokers.)

Try Smokeshield. Studies suggest that New Chapter's Smokeshield, which is available at health food stores, can help neutralize cancer-causing toxins in smoke. This supplement, which contains ginger, turmeric, and other natural products, may benefit smokers as well as firefighters and people who are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke, air pollution, and exhaust fumes.

Weigh the risks of estrogen. Evidence is mixed, but some researchers suspect that supplemental estrogen used to treat menopausal symptoms may increase a woman's risk of lung cancer. Conversely, the phytoestrogens in soy may have a protective effect: One study found that nonsmoking women who eat more soy foods have a lower risk of lung cancer than those who eat less (*International Journal of Cancer*, January 20, 2002).

(Tell your doctor if you have symptoms like a cough that lasts longer than two weeks, wheezing, or coughing up blood, which can signal lung cancer.) **SP**

Last summer, I spent a week on a fishing boat in Alaska to learn more about that state's fisheries. While there, I watched black cod being harvested from great depths. This fish has a high content of healthful omega-3 fatty acids—more than salmon—and it's lower in harmful contaminants like mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) than many other fish. The main problem with black cod is availability, because almost all of the Alaskan catch goes to Japan. I'd like to see North Americans wake up to the value of this most desirable fish and take it back for ourselves.

You can find black cod in this country. I first ate this fish in Japanese restaurants in Seattle, marinated in miso (soybean paste), then steamed or grilled. A magnificent preparation of this sort is the signature dish at New York's famous Nobu restaurant; I've enjoyed it there several times. (If you search the Internet for "black cod with miso," you will find the recipe.) Later, I learned that black cod is not a true cod, although it has a black skin over its white flesh. And I was surprised to discover that I knew it in another form by a different name: sablefish, as in the smoked sable sold in Jewish and Russian delis. I'm now seeing it called "butterfish" on some menus, a better descriptor, because the soft, mild flesh does, indeed, melt in your mouth.

Fresh or frozen black cod is good steamed, pan fried, or broiled. Cold smoked products can be steamed, broiled, or grilled. As consumer demand rises, you should be able to find this fish on more restaurant menus, websites (like www.vitalchoice.com), and in markets. So start asking for it!

And in case you were wondering, we've given *Self Healing* a new look for 2005.



Andrew Weil, MD

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Good Health on a Budget

Good health is priceless, but you don't have to spend a fortune to achieve it. Some ideas:

Wash your hands often. Using soap and water is the most important thing you can do to ward off colds, flu, and other infectious illnesses. Antibacterial soaps aren't needed.

Manage your appetite. If you reach for food when you're stressed, try doing my Relaxing Breath exercise (see my books) instead; by the time you finish, your craving may have passed. Be conscious of portion sizes, and learn to eat when you're truly hungry.

Take a daily walk. Walking outdoors is a great way to fight cabin fever, work off extra calories, and get bone-building vitamin D from sunlight (light is nature's mood booster). Bring along a two- or four-legged friend for companionship and motivation.

Get enough shuteye. Besides sapping your energy, skimping on sleep also lowers immunity and may play a role in the development of diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Stick to a regular sleep schedule, and develop a bedtime ritual to help you wind down.

Write it down. Expressing your feelings in a journal can help get things off your chest and may even improve health problems.

Chill out. Regular practice of a relaxation technique like breath work, meditation, or guided imagery can lower your stress levels and strengthen immunity. When you're feeling tense or upset, taking a few slow, deep breaths can calm you down.

Clean out clutter. Make your home more tranquil by not being a pack rat. Avoid mental clutter by going media-free (TV, radio, print, and Internet) for a few days each month.

Be sociable. The stronger the relationships in your life, the better your health tends to be. Spend time with people who make you feel more alive, happy, and optimistic.

Save on alternative therapies. You can get discounted services from students studying to be alternative practitioners and even from their instructors when you receive care at the schools—of massage, acupuncture, or whatever—where they are in training. Check your local Yellow Pages for schools.

Book time with a personal trainer. Arrange a single session with a trainer, who can design a complete exercise program and make sure you're doing everything properly. 

Fasting: A Fresh Start toward Better Health

You might fast before a medical procedure or for religious or political reasons. But a short-term fast can also be a transformative experience by serving as a gateway to a healthier diet and lifestyle.

To fast means to take in only water or unsweetened teas but no calories for a period of time. Drinking only juice or eating only fruit for several days isn't a true fast; it's actually a restricted diet. Yet, either approach can rest the digestive organs, freeing up energy for the body to use for other purposes, such as healing and fighting off infections. (Restricted diets, especially fruits, provide nutrients and calories but don't stress the digestive system in the same way as regular eating.)

When done for one to three days, a water-only fast or a juice or fruit "fast" can be a cleansing experience for both the body and mind. A juice fast can also be a good antidote after overindulging in heavy foods and alcohol.

Some holistic practitioners believe that fasting helps remove potentially damaging toxins from the body that can overwork the kidneys, liver, and gastrointestinal tract. I don't agree that fasting is necessary to detoxify because I think the best way to do that is to live a clean life to begin with. There's no need to fast if you already eat a healthy diet with good sources of dietary fiber, drink plenty of water, don't smoke, and sweat regularly (through exercise or use of steam rooms and saunas).

A brief fast is safe for most healthy people as long as they drink enough fluids. Yet, some people shouldn't fast—pregnant or breastfeeding women and anyone who has heart problems, diabetes, cancer, or another chronic illness, or is underweight.

Long-term fasting—beyond three days—for therapeutic purposes should only be done with medical supervision. I have known patients with ulcerative colitis, rheumatoid arthritis, and asthma to achieve complete remission through prolonged fasting, and there's some evidence it can help treat hypertension. Since this is a drastic approach, be sure to consult a practitioner who specializes in therapeutic fasting through the International Association of Hygienic Physicians at <http://iahp.cisnet.com> or (330) 788-0526. 

Steps to a Safe Short-Term Fast

Fasting requires thought and planning; these suggestions can help you do just that.

Before

Set realistic expectations. Fasting won't jump-start a weight loss program since it actually slows metabolism. But people often describe a sense of lightness and mental clarity, and say that hidden emotions might surface.

Select a weekend. First-timers should choose a weekend day to avoid the strains of work and other responsibilities, to rest when needed, and to spend less time around others who might be eating. Decide if you're fasting from sundown to sundown or sunrise to sunrise; there's no real advantage of one over the other.

Wean the caffeine. To avoid a caffeine withdrawal headache, you can either wean yourself off it in the days preceding your fast or include caffeinated teas during it.

During

Slow down. It's unrealistic for fasters to go about their usual activities. Conserve your energy by listening to relaxing music, reading, meditating, and napping. Allow time for quiet introspection, too. If you want to exercise, I suggest that you limit yourself to walking, or doing yoga, tai chi, or other forms of gentle stretching.

Anticipate discomfort. Fasting can be difficult. Its side effects may include dizziness, fatigue, irritability, and headaches. Bad ("faster's") breath can occur and your tongue may feel coated. You might be cold, since your body temperature drops, and also have body aches or skin breakouts. You might feel hungry the first day but as time passes, these feelings might subside.

Get ample liquids. For a water-only fast, drink enough to urinate frequently, about 64 to 96 ounces of liquids a day. For a juice-only fast, aim for the same quantities of fluids. However, I suggest diluting bottled fruit juices with water or sparkling water to decrease their concentration of sugar or acidity, or you can drink full-strength vegetable juices, which contain less sugar. You can also make your own using a juicer or blender. Two of my favorite homemade blends are carrot, apple, and a piece of ginger as well as a vegetable juice medley with celery, carrot, and onion. Test out your own juice recipes before you begin your fast.

Take your medications. If you regularly take medications or a daily multivitamin or other supplements, don't forgo them during a fast unless they're not appropriate on an empty stomach. It's fine to skip any fat-soluble vitamins, like vitamins D, E, or mixed carotenoids, which are best absorbed when taken with a meal containing some fat.

Stay regular. For fasts longer than a day, I suggest taking a natural laxative like psyllium (found at health food stores). Mix one tablespoon of the powder into a large glass of water and drink this each morning of your fast, followed by another tall glass of water.

After

Eat lightly. Break your fast sensibly, carefully, and gradually. First eat plain, simple foods in small amounts such as fresh fruits, juices, soups, or salads, then perhaps later have some cooked whole grains. You don't want to gorge or go for heavy foods. Recognize that fasting may renew your motivation to live well and give you a newfound appreciation for food and hunger.

Eight Natural Fertility Boosters

Couples who have delayed starting a family received troubling news a few years ago when a study found that fertility begins declining earlier than previously believed—in the late 20s for women and after age 35 for men (*Human Reproduction*, May 2002). Yet, this doesn't mean that people in their 30s, 40s, or even older won't be able to conceive.

Besides age, a number of other factors can influence fertility rates: In women, irregular ovulation (caused by weight changes or polycystic ovarian syndrome, for example) or scarring in the reproductive organs from conditions like endometriosis or pelvic inflammatory disease can make it harder to become pregnant. For men, fertility concerns are usually due to difficulties with the number, shape, and movement of sperm. But these problems don't mean you *can't* have children, only that conception may be more of a challenge and take longer to achieve.

Improving the Odds of Conception

Conventional doctors typically treat infertility—the inability to get pregnant after a year of unprotected intercourse—with drugs and procedures that can be very effective but also costly, time-consuming, and emotionally draining.

Before going that route, I suggest that couples experiment with the natural measures below, which can boost fertility without the side effects of high-tech treatments. I'd give the approaches here about a year before turning to conventional medicine. If you do opt for fertility drugs, in vitro fertilization (IVF), or other conventional treatments, it appears safe—and even beneficial—to continue using these natural approaches at the same time.

1 Maintain a healthy weight. Being either too heavy or too thin can impair ovulation in women and lower a man's sperm count by affecting levels of the sex hormones necessary to conceive. Also, be careful of the intensity and type of exercise you do: While I definitely recommend physical activity, frequent vigorous workouts can interrupt ovulation, while activities that regularly put pressure on men's genitals (like cycling) can reduce sperm quality. Stick to moderate exercise, such as brisk walking.

2 Break bad habits. In men, smoking, drinking alcohol, and using drugs like cocaine and marijuana can reduce the number and quality of sperm. And the more cigarettes a woman smokes and the more years she has been a smoker, the harder it is for her to conceive. Smoking can also decrease the effectiveness of conventional fertility treatments. In addition, some studies suggest that drinking caffeinated beverages like coffee can decrease fertility in women. Since these habits can also harm a developing fetus if you do get pregnant, it's best to eliminate them now.

3 Stress less. Fertility problems can increase stress and trigger depression. Ironically, these emotions themselves appear to reduce fertility in women, creating a vicious cycle. Meanwhile, studies have found that women who regularly practice mind-body measures like guided imagery, meditation,

and yoga have significantly higher chances of conception. Seeking therapy or attending an infertility support group may also help. To learn more about this topic, see *Conquering Infertility* by Alice Domar, PhD, and Alice Lesch Kelly (Penguin, 2004). Other good resources include Belleruth Naparstek's guided-imagery recording *Help for Infertility* (to order, call 800-800-8661 or visit www.healthjourneys.com) and Dr. Steven Gurgevich's hypnosis recording *Fertility Booster* (call 866-506-1700 or visit www.tranceformation.com).

4 Keep cool. A man's testes must be slightly cooler than normal body temperature to produce healthy sperm, so avoid saunas, steam rooms, and hot tubs while trying to conceive. Contrary to popular belief, choice of underwear probably has no effect on sperm production, but you may want to opt for boxers (which are cooler) over briefs just in case.

5 Stay safe. Exposure to chemicals in pesticides, paints, solvents, and other products can damage sperm and may impair female fertility, too. I'd avoid these products when trying to get pregnant and choose organic foods to further reduce your exposure to them.

6 Get the right nutrients. Your chances of getting pregnant will be maximized if your body is healthy, so be sure to eat a balanced diet. Various studies have found that vitamins and minerals like vitamins C, E, B-12, folic acid, selenium, and zinc, as well as the carotenoid lycopene, can improve sperm quality, so I recommend that men aim to get these compounds through a healthy diet, multivitamin, or both. Because folic acid can prevent birth defects as early as the first days of conception, many doctors recommend that women start taking prenatal vitamins (which tend to contain more folic acid than regular multivitamins) even before they get pregnant.

7 Experiment with acupuncture. Research shows that women who receive this ancient needling technique while undergoing IVF treatments are more likely to conceive. It's not clear how acupuncture works, although it may improve blood supply to the reproductive organs and reduce stress. Other research suggests that regular acupuncture treatments may benefit male infertility by increasing sperm count and quality.

8 Try alternative healing systems. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has a good track record in boosting fertility; many of my patients have had great results with it. TCM treats each case of male or female infertility as unique, and typically views it as a problem of energy flow. For best results, see a practitioner of TCM, who may use herbs, acupuncture, and other techniques. And, although they can be difficult to locate, I think that it may be worth visiting a shaman as a last resort: These medicine men and women, often of Native American descent, perform ceremonies that can boost fertility in some couples. 

For integrative approaches to lower blood sugar, purchase the **Self Healing Special Report on Diabetes** (brochure enclosed).

Therapeutic Breathing Approaches for Body & Mind

I frequently recommend breathing exercises as simple yet effective ways to calm your mind and promote optimum health (see box). Below I'll tell you about three breathing-based therapies that are used to help treat different physical and mental health concerns.

Buteyko method. This approach to managing asthma was developed in the 1950s by Russian physician Konstantin Buteyko and is now popular in Australia and New Zealand. It's based on the idea that asthma is caused by hyperventilation (overbreathing), which results in too much carbon dioxide being lost from the body. The method involves taking shallow breaths through the nose and practicing holding your breath in order to increase carbon dioxide levels. Proponents claim that those who regularly practice this therapy can help prevent asthma attacks and stop them in their early stages.

Early studies have shown some benefits. In one trial, people with asthma who practiced Buteyko breathing exercises twice a day for six months had fewer symptoms and were able to reduce their use of bronchodilator drugs to relieve asthma attacks. Yet, there was no improvement in their lung function, and they weren't able to lower their dosage of inhaled steroids taken to prevent attacks (*Thorax*, August 2003).

My colleague John Mark, MD, a pediatric lung specialist at the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine, knows adults and children who have improved markedly from the Buteyko approach. However, he suspects the method's success may be due to the relaxing effect of the breathing techniques rather than just increasing carbon dioxide levels. Other breathing techniques or therapies that involve breath work (such as yoga and the martial arts) can also benefit people with asthma, he notes. For more, contact Buteyko Asthma Education USA (www.buteyko-usa.com; 877-278-4623).

Holotropic Breathwork. This body-oriented psychotherapy was developed in the mid-1970s by psychiatrist Stanislav Grof, MD, and his wife, Christina. It uses rapid, deep breathing and evocative music to induce a trance state, which can allow access to buried memories. In workshops led by trained facilitators, participants pair up and take turns doing the breath work. The "breather" lies on the floor with eyes closed, while the "sitter" observes and offers support. If desired, facilitators can apply hands-on pressure to release muscle tension.

By allowing participants to enter states of consciousness not ordinarily experienced in daily life, this approach can activate inner healing mechanisms and stimulate powerful insights, says Scotty Johnson, co-founder of the Breathworks Institute in Tucson, Arizona, and a Holotropic Breathwork facilitator. At the University of Arizona's integrative medicine clinic, we sometimes recommend the method to patients who have illnesses with a strong mind-body component, such as irritable bowel syndrome, chronic fatigue or pain, and depression. Johnson says that Holotropic Breathwork can also help relieve addictions and stimulate blocked creativity.

This therapy is not recommended for pregnant women or people who have heart disease, epilepsy, glaucoma, or severe mental disorders like psychotic episodes or bipolar disorder.

Squeezing Out More Air

This exercise, suitable for anyone, can help deepen your breathing. Surprisingly, the best way to do this is by *exhaling* more air, not by inhaling more of it. Try taking a deep breath, letting it out effortlessly, and then squeezing out more air. You should feel the effort in the intercostal muscles between your ribs. If you do this exercise whenever you think of it, you will gradually build up these muscles, and your exhalations will become deeper. At first you will need to do this consciously, but with regular practice it will become an unconscious process. Over time, the length of your exhalations will naturally equal that of your inhalations (in most people, inhalations last much longer).

For more breathing exercises, check out my recording *Breathing: The Master Key to Self Healing*. To order this tape or CD, call (888) 337-9345.

For more, contact the Association for Holotropic Breathwork International (www.breathwork.com; 520-760-2335) or Grof Transpersonal Training (www.holotropic.com; 415-383-8779).

Kundalini yoga breathing techniques. Certain breathing exercises used in Kundalini yoga have shown promise for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), an anxiety disorder marked by recurrent, obsessive thoughts and compulsive rituals. People with an obsession about germs, for example, may wash their hands constantly. OCD may involve abnormalities in the brain's right hemisphere, says David Shannahoff-Khalsa, a neuroscientist at the University of California, San Diego. He believes that a yogic technique of left-nostril breathing (by blocking the right nostril) can stimulate activity in the right hemisphere and compensate for OCD-related abnormalities, leading to reduced symptoms.

Small studies by Shannahoff-Khalsa look encouraging. In one study of OCD patients, half practiced Kundalini yoga breathing exercises (especially left-nostril breathing) for one hour a day, and the other half practiced two different mind-body techniques—the Relaxation Response and mindfulness meditation—each for 30 minutes daily. After three months, the OCD symptoms of the yoga group had improved by 38 percent, compared to 14 percent in the other group. Afterwards, both groups practiced yogic breathing only for another year, at which point the combined group had an average improvement of 70 percent (*CNS Spectrums*, December 1999).

I look forward to seeing larger-scale studies of these yogic breathing techniques, but I see no harm in OCD patients trying them now. To buy a video that teaches these exercises, visit Shannahoff-Khalsa's website at www.theinternetyogi.com. The video is also suitable for people who are suffering from other anxiety disorders. 

Ask Dr. Weil Natural Facelifts; Prebiotics; & More

I suffer from gout and find that celery seed helps prevent and reduce attacks. What do you think of this folk remedy?

I have no experience with celery seed supplements, but some people have found they ease the pain and inflammation associated with gout and other arthritic conditions. Animal research suggests that celery seed acts as a diuretic, increasing urine production. In theory, this would help flush excess uric acid—the cause of gout—from the body, but no human clinical studies have been published to support this idea.

Celery seed appears to be safe, although it may increase the effects of blood-thinning drugs like Coumadin and aspirin. It can also cause sun sensitivity, so be sure to wear sunscreen if you take it. However, if you've been using celery seed with

good results and no ill effects, I see no reason not to continue. For more advice on treating gout, see the July 2004 issue.

What do you think of so-called acupuncture facelifts that claim to make you look younger without surgery?

I think they may offer a less-invasive but less-dramatic alternative to cosmetic surgery. Practitioners say that inserting small needles into the face can promote the circulation of blood and vital energy (*qi*) to the skin, increasing muscle tone and elasticity and making wrinkles less noticeable. Also called facial-rejuvenation acupuncture, the procedure is performed by an acupuncturist rather than a cosmetic surgeon. Sessions last about an hour or less, and it may take 10 to 25 weekly

Five Concerns about Hormones in Milk

It's been said that milk is "nature's perfect food." But milk is far from perfect when you consider the artificial hormones used to boost its production in cows, the concern about possible antibiotic residues in it, the difficulty many people have digesting lactose, and the immune-system irritation caused by casein, its main protein. In fact, many of my patients with allergies, autoimmune diseases, eczema, chronic bronchitis, and asthma say they have fewer symptoms when they eliminate milk from their diet.

Since there's confusion about whether the hormones in milk are harmful, I'd like to discuss five concerns I have about them.

Hormones aren't necessary. An estimated 15 to 30 percent of dairy cows in this country are injected with rBGH (or rBST), a genetically engineered bovine growth hormone that increases the cow's output of milk. Ironically, this is done despite a national surplus of milk. While the FDA maintains that rBGH is safe and nearly identical to the growth hormone that cows naturally produce, many scientists don't believe enough research has been done on it.

They're not good for cows or us. Cows injected with rBGH have more

fertility problems, and their udders are more susceptible to infection, requiring more treatment with antibiotics. (Hormones aren't given to organic herds.) Critics contend that milk from hormone-treated cows may have higher levels of IGF-1 (insulin-like growth factor-1), a protein that might pass into the bloodstream of milk drinkers. IGF-1 stimulates cell division and tumor growth, which may increase the odds of breast, colon, and prostate cancers.

Cancer links are suggested. Although still inconclusive and theoretical, scientists have investigated a possible connection between IGF-1 and cancer. A study of women found that those under 50 with the highest concentrations of IGF-1 in their blood were about seven times more likely to develop premenopausal breast cancer than women with the lowest levels (*The Lancet*, May 9, 1998). But studies looking at dairy consumption and women's breast cancer risk have yielded mixed results. Also, Harvard researchers have found that men who drank two or more glasses of milk a day were nearly twice as likely to develop prostate cancer as men who drank none (*Cancer Research*, February 1, 1998). Right now, it's not clear if this increased risk is due to IGF-1,

or if it's instead associated with higher intakes of calcium or fat from milk and dairy products.

They're banned elsewhere. In 1999, Canada and the European Union banned rBGH because of concerns that it was too hard on the cows rather than for any health or safety concerns in humans. It's also not allowed in Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. I don't understand why Americans are so complacent about this issue. Even though there's only indirect evidence of a health risk from rBGH, I believe the link is strong enough to warrant more consumer response. If you drink cow's milk, I encourage you to buy organic.

All dairy products are affected. True, the main concern is with hormones found in cow's milk, since more of this beverage is consumed by volume than other dairy products. But this same milk is also used to make cheese, ice cream, cream, sour cream, yogurt, and butter. If you're a cheese lover, you can avoid these concerns by not using American brands or buying only organic versions of them. Nondairy milks and products made from soy, rice, or almonds are not derived from animals, and are free of hormones, antibiotics, and saturated fat. **SP**

sessions before you see full results. Acupuncture facelifts are free of the side effects associated with Botox treatment and surgical facelifts, don't require anesthesia, and are less expensive than surgery, but the results aren't as obvious as either of these other methods. Plus, like Botox, the procedure may need to be repeated over time to maintain its effects.

In general, I'm not fond of procedures that attempt to halt the natural aging process, but acupuncture facelifts seem to be safe for people who wish to improve their appearance. Interestingly, my friend Ken Rosen, an acupuncturist based in Huntington, New York, says that acupuncture facelifts may have psychological benefits as well: His patients find the technique helps them relax and unwind, which has the added bonus of minimizing stress lines on their faces.

What are prebiotics? You didn't mention them in your recent article on probiotics (October 2004).

Prebiotics are nondigestible food substances that encourage the growth and activity of "friendly" bacteria (probiotics) in the intestinal tract. Prebiotics are naturally found in certain fruits, vegetables, and herbs, including artichoke, asparagus, bananas, chicory, garlic, and onions. Prebiotics such as FOS (fructo-oligosaccharides) and inulin are also sold as tablets, capsules, and powders, either alone or in combination with probiotics. Some alternative practitioners recommend prebiotic supplements, with or without probiotics, to treat irritable bowel syndrome and other digestive problems.

I have no experience with prebiotics, so I checked with Russell Greenfield, MD, medical director of Carolinas Integrative Health in Charlotte, North Carolina, who has written about them. It's possible that prebiotic supplements may help keep probiotic organisms alive and flourishing in the intestinal tract, he says, yet there's no scientific evidence that prebiotics are absolutely necessary. "If someone chooses to use a probiotic supplement that also includes prebiotics, I think that's great," asserts Dr. Greenfield. "But I don't go out of my way to ask patients to take prebiotics. The same goes for eating more foods that contain them."

The supplement Zyflamend helped ease my tendinitis. The pain is gone, but should I keep taking it as a preventive?

The herbal anti-inflammatory supplement Zyflamend from New Chapter appears to be safe to use long term, but perhaps the best preventive strategy for tendinitis is learning to avoid those movements that caused stress or overuse of the tendon in the first place. (Tendons connect muscle to bone.) Tendinitis is a common inflammatory condition of the shoulders, wrists, hips, knees, and heels. Since your pain is gone, instead of relying on the supplement every day, I suggest you phase off it. Start by taking Zyflamend every other day, then every three days, and eventually moving toward once a week or less. You want to find a level where your symptoms are under control, yet you're not taking Zyflamend all the time. 

Are Vitamin E Supplements Safe?

By now, you've likely heard about the controversial report linking vitamin E supplements to an increased risk of death. In this meta-analysis, Johns Hopkins University researchers combined the results of 19 previous studies of people taking vitamin E and found that those who supplemented with at least 400 IU a day were about 10 percent more likely to die than those who did not. The scientists concluded that doses of vitamin E higher than 400 IU daily should be avoided. (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, November 10, 2004)

Comment: I have a number of problems with this poorly designed analysis. First, many of the studies included elderly people who had problems like cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, and kidney failure, which would put them at an already higher risk of dying. There's no way of knowing whether these same findings also apply to healthy people. Plus, basing conclusions on combined data from different studies can create weak statistical associations that are hardly definitive. I fault the study's authors for writing such alarmist prose in order to get headlines. Some studies suggest that vitamin E supplements reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers, and I will continue to recommend taking 400 to 800 IU of natural vitamin E (or 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols) daily to get optimum levels of this important antioxidant.

Meditation May Change the Brain

Regularly practicing meditation may produce lasting, positive changes in the brain. That's the finding of a recent study involving eight Buddhist monks who had each spent at least 10,000 hours in meditation and 10 novice meditators. Both groups practiced compassion meditation, generating a feeling of loving-kindness toward all beings, while researchers measured their brain activity using electroencephalograms.

The monks had higher levels of gamma waves—high-frequency brain activity involved in attention, memory, and learning—before they began meditation, and this difference increased sharply during meditation. The monks also had more brain activity in areas associated with positive emotions, such as happiness. Plus, the monks who had spent the most hours meditating had the greatest brain changes. (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, November 16, 2004)

Comment: As a longtime meditator, I've found its benefits accumulate over time, and I hope this study inspires more people to take up the practice and stick with it. Also, I believe high-tech studies of low-tech, mind-body approaches like meditation will help bring these therapies into the medical mainstream. 

Using Tonic Herbs

The word “tonic” may conjure up images of old-fashioned patent medicines, but tonic herbs are anything but snake oil. The term actually derives from the Greek word for *stretch*, and these plant-based remedies do stretch or tone the body and especially the immune system much as physical exercise tones the muscles. In fact, in Asian medicine and other healing systems, herbs like ashwagandha, ginseng, and rhodiola are considered superior treatments because they operate on many fronts at once and strengthen the natural defenses of the body, something most conventional drugs can't do.

I've had a special interest in tonics ever since my early training as a botanist, and over my years of practicing medicine I've become convinced of their importance for health. Also known as adaptogens, these herbs have been shown to increase the body's ability to deal with stress. I often recommend them to patients who are debilitated, recovering from illness or injury, coping with excessive stress, or who are fatigued. I've found that, when taken long term, these generally nontoxic herbs can restore energy, boost immunity, and increase resistance to disease.

Here is the latest information on several of my favorite tonic herbs, which are sold at health food stores as capsules, tablets, and liquids. Try one at a time; follow package directions, giving it a two-month trial to see how it affects you. You should notice increased energy and perhaps greater physical and mental stamina. It's fine to take these herbs indefinitely, and although they do boost immunity they're safe for people with autoimmune conditions. (To avoid building up any tolerance, some herbalists advise taking a tonic in three-month cycles, with a one- to two-week break in between.)

Ashwagandha. Often called Indian ginseng, the roots of this evergreen shrub (*Withania somnifera*) have been used in ayurvedic medicine for thousands of years to promote strength and stamina. More human studies are needed, but lab and animal research suggests the herb may boost white-blood-cell counts and other measures of immunity. Ashwagandha has a mild sedative effect, even though it increases physical endurance and energy.

Best for: People who suffer from anxiety, irritability, or sleep problems may benefit from ashwagandha's slightly sedating properties. Plus, some of my patients with multiple sclerosis say they've found it helps alleviate the fatigue that accompanies this disease and helps keep it in remission.

Eleuthero. You may know this herb (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) as Siberian ginseng, but it's actually only a distant relative

of true (*Panax*) ginseng. Eleuthero was popularized in the 1950s by Soviet researchers looking for new adaptogens. Animal and human studies in Russia and elsewhere have found it may improve physical stamina and performance, increase mental alertness and productivity, and help people resist illness.

Best for: Its general restorative effects. Try eleuthero if you feel exhausted, are coping with a heavy work schedule, or just need more energy.

Ginseng. The word *Panax* means “all healing,” and indeed, both Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*) and American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) are said to counteract weakness and fatigue, increase resistance to stress, and promote longevity. Asian ginseng is one of the better-researched tonics, with some studies suggesting that it may boost immunity as well as improve libido in men. Other research has found that American ginseng can lower blood sugar levels in people who have diabetes.

Best for: Those who want the root's adaptogenic effects can experiment with American ginseng, while the Asian form is for people more interested in its stimulant or sexual effects. I recommend either type to people with low vitality or those debilitated by chronic illness or old age. The Asian variety elevates blood pressure in some people and can cause or worsen insomnia and anxiety. If you suffer from these conditions—or if you have diabetes—you may do better with the American species. Be aware that ginseng may decrease the effectiveness of blood thinners like Coumadin.

Reishi. Valued by the Chinese and Japanese for extending longevity, this woody mushroom (*Ganoderma lucidum*) contains various immune-boosting, anti-allergic, and anti-inflammatory compounds. Mainly studied in Asia, reishi has been shown to strengthen immunity against viral infections and help protect against cancer.

Best for: People with cancer, HIV or AIDS, chronic infections, or otherwise compromised immunity. The mushroom may also be useful for people who have allergies or inflammatory conditions like arthritis.

Rhodiola. Newly popular in this country, rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*) has long been used in Russia and Scandinavia as an energy booster and immune system strengthener. Some research shows that rhodiola, also known as Arctic root, can increase work performance and reduce mental fatigue. Studies suggest it may work by increasing levels of mood-elevating brain chemicals like serotonin.

Best for: Cases of acute stress, like preparing for a final exam or deadline at work, since rhodiola appears to work faster than other tonic herbs. The herb, which is said to create a mildly uplifting feeling, may also benefit people with depression. Avoid taking rhodiola at bedtime; it may interfere with sleep or cause vivid dreams. 

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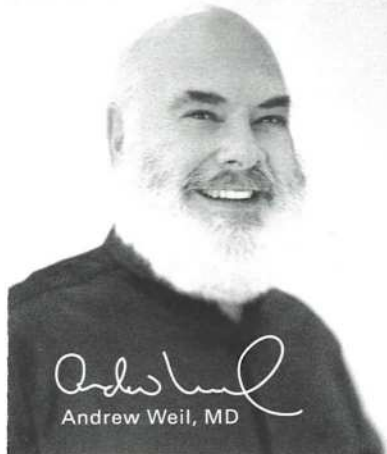
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Making Sense of Scents

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ON MY MIND:

Persimmons

I first ate persimmons while in Japan, where that delicious fruit is popular. Now I buy them here from October to February, when they're in season.

Health benefits: The bright orange skin and flesh are due to the fruit's rich content of carotenoids, powerful antioxidants. Persimmons also have vitamin C, potassium, and fiber, and they're low on the glycemic index. They have about as many calories as pears.

Varieties: The Hachiya is about the size of a peach and shaped like an acorn. When fully ripened and soft, they have a sweet, spicy flavor. The smaller, flatter Fuyu is mildly sweet with a crisp texture.

How to eat: You can eat Fuyus like apples, or slice them and add to salads or cereal. Cut Hachiyas lengthwise, remove seeds, and spoon out the flesh. Add Hachiya purée to baked goods and puddings. 

Whether the scent of coconut transports you back to your tropical vacation or the aroma of freshly baked cookies reminds you of your grandmother's kitchen, it's clear that smell has a powerful influence on mood. Researchers believe that's because aromatic molecules in the nasal cavity stimulate nerves that send impulses to the limbic system, the area of the brain associated with emotion and memory.

I'm not surprised, then, that certain smells can have such wide-ranging effects on how we feel: Most people find scents like lavender and vanilla calming, for example, while rosemary and citrus tend to be energizing. Such effects are central to the practice of aromatherapy, which uses essential oils from flowers, leaves, fruits, barks, or roots to influence physical and mental health. Essential oils are available at health food stores and online. You may be able to reap their benefits by using them at home in a diffuser (which uses heat or a fan to release the scents into the air), adding them to bath water, or rubbing them on your skin (mix them with a "carrier oil" like any edible vegetable oil first and do a spot test to make sure that you're not allergic).

While much more research still needs to be done, we already know the following intriguing facts about the therapeutic use of essential oils.

Alertness. The culinary herb rosemary has a reputation as a memory aid dating back to ancient Greece, and recent research offers support for this idea: In a study of nearly 150 people, scientists in the United Kingdom found that the scent of rosemary can increase alertness and enhance memory (*International Journal of Neuroscience*, January 2003).

Alopecia. Although it's not clear why, a 1998 study found that essential oils may combat a form of temporary hair loss called alopecia areata. Of 84 people, one group massaged a mixture of four essential oils (thyme,

rosemary, lavender, and cedarwood) and two carrier oils into their scalps on a daily basis; the other group simply used the carrier oils. After seven months, 44 percent of those who used the essential oils showed improvement, compared to just 15 percent of those who used the carrier oils.

Alzheimer's disease. Most people can detect more than 10,000 different odors. The inability to recognize certain smells can be an early sign of Alzheimer's disease (AD). Recent research finds that people who were later diagnosed with AD had trouble identifying scents like strawberry, smoke, and lemon. Researchers say that such a "smell test" could someday be used to detect AD in its early stages. Meanwhile, other studies suggest that lavender oil can reduce agitation in dementia patients when used in a diffuser or during a massage.

Headache. Research in Germany suggests that peppermint oil rubbed on the forehead and temples can reduce the intensity of tension headaches, perhaps by increasing blood flow to the skin.

Libido. In research designed to determine which scents boost sexual arousal, licorice, cucumber, and baby powder were found to best increase blood flow to women's genitals. For men, pumpkin pie was most appealing. Experts theorize that certain aromas may stimulate areas of the brain related to sexual arousal or simply trigger pleasant memories, increasing receptivity to sex.

Weight loss. In a 1995 study, overweight people sniffed from inhalers with scents like peppermint, green apple, and banana whenever they were hungry. Those who used the inhalers frequently lost about 5 pounds a month. Since about 90 percent of what we perceive as taste is actually smell, researchers suspect that simply smelling a food may fool people's brains into believing they've eaten more than they actually have, making them feel full sooner. 

With Valentine's Day approaching, it's a good time to turn your attention to matters of the heart. Heart disease remains the leading cause of age-related health problems in our country, and its prevention should be a priority for all of us. The lifestyle patterns that contribute to it are well known and begin early in life: eating unhealthy diets, not getting enough exercise, being overweight, and not controlling stress.

Last year, researchers in the United Kingdom urged the creation of a "Polypill" to prevent heart disease—a single pill that would contain six different medications including aspirin to thin the blood, a statin drug to lower cholesterol, folic acid to lower serum homocysteine, and three different antihypertensive drugs. Now an article in the *British Medical Journal* (December 18, 2004) recommends a daily "Polymeal" consisting of fruits and vegetables, some almonds, a bit of garlic, and a handful of dark chocolate, all washed down with a glass of wine, plus fish four times a week. The authors say this regimen could cut heart disease risk by 76 percent.

To me, the Polymeal seems like a more natural, safer, and tastier alternative to the Polypill. Although I don't advise people who do not currently drink alcohol to start doing so for health reasons, I have long told readers of *Self Healing* to eat all these foods to lower their risk of heart disease. Dark chocolate is the component of the Polymeal most associated with this season, and research continues to support claims that it is, indeed, heart healthy. Choose dark chocolate containing at least 70 percent cocoa and make sure that the label lists chocolate (as chocolate liquor, cacao, or cocoa) as its first ingredient instead of sugar. Enjoy!



Andrew Weil, MD

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Avoiding a Food Fight

Couples may squabble over money, politics, or child-rearing, but in some relationships, food is a source of tension. What can two people do when their eating habits clash? They can communicate, compromise, and be creative, three key ingredients for resolving the following culinary challenges:

The food cop. Monitoring and critiquing someone's every bite or weight is a recipe for trouble. People eat for a variety of reasons, from pleasure and comfort to stress and nourishment. Changing a person's relationship with food is complex and not simply a matter of greater willpower or self-discipline. Avoid passing judgment, nagging, and stressing the negatives. Instead, focus on setting a good example and making dietary suggestions in a positive and considerate way.

The vegetarian and carnivore. Respect a person's food choices without preaching or trying to convert your partner. Despite your dining differences, there's room for common ground. I've often found that a vegetarian lasagna or chili, for example, is a real crowd pleaser, and meat-eaters don't leave hungry or feel deprived. Others get around this by preparing a basic stir-fry, pasta dish, pizza,

soup, or salad, and adding meat last for the person who wants it.

The diet saboteur. One person is dieting; the other is not. This cooks up conflict, especially if usual eating routines are disrupted. The dieter should discuss his or her goals and reasons for making these lifestyle changes, and ask for support and cooperation instead of temptation. Enjoy your time together in other ways besides meals, such as exercising, sharing a hobby, or socializing.

The picky eater and foodie. When one person's taste buds are open to experimentation and the other is timid, you can try to find a happy medium; otherwise, the adventurous eater might always feel like they're giving in or limiting their culinary horizons. Sampling an unfamiliar food might pleasantly surprise a picky eater, or the foodie can indulge their tastes on their own, like at lunchtime. Other solutions are taking turns choosing a restaurant, selecting one with a varied menu, or ordering take-out from two different, but nearby, eateries.

For more ideas, see *Your Diet Is Driving Me Crazy* by Cynthia Sass, RD, and Denise Maher (Marlowe & Company, 2004). 

Choosing Cooking Oils

In the push for Americans to get the fat out of their diets, it's easy to point fingers at cooking oils. At roughly 120 calories per tablespoon, you should use these plant-based fats wisely. But instead of fearing dietary fat, I believe that it's important to understand how to avoid bad fat and let some good fat in. Here's a handy guide to selecting various cooking oils.

Olive oil. I consider this the best general-purpose oil and suggest you make it your principal dietary fat. It's mostly monounsaturated fat, which lowers LDL ("bad") cholesterol without affecting HDL ("good") cholesterol, making it a heart-healthy choice. Antioxidant-rich compounds in olive oil, such as polyphenols and flavonoids, may also help reduce the risk of cancer.

Best for: Salad dressings, marinades, or for dipping bread.

Tips: Buy only extra-virgin varieties from the first gentle pressing of the olives. Although expensive, this type is the most flavorful and richest in antioxidants. The best ones have a fruity aroma.

Canola. This neutral oil is obtained from rapeseed, a mustard relative widely cultivated in Canada, hence the name Canadian oil, or "canola." It contains mostly monounsaturated fat with the least amount of saturated fat of edible oils. I disagree with unfounded warnings about the dangers of using canola oil (all over the Internet).

Best for: Cooking, baking, and salad dressings.

Tips: Buy only organic, expeller-pressed varieties, meaning that chemicals weren't used to extract the oil and pesticides weren't sprayed on the rapeseed, as is commonly done.

Going Coconuts?

Last year, the book *The Hamptons Diet* touted macadamia nut oil as its main monounsaturated fat and as a key ingredient for losing weight. Now, several diet books suggest that using coconut oil in place of vegetable oils can help you slim down. Why? Even though coconut oil has the highest percentage of saturated fats of vegetable oils, the authors contend that they're in the form of medium-chain fatty acids, which supposedly increase metabolism and are digested more easily and absorbed differently than other dietary fats. There's little human research to support this thinking, and many of these books' assumptions that coconut oil is healthy are based on population studies of traditional diets of Polynesian Islanders, who regularly consume this tropical oil. The relevance of these findings to our population is questionable.

My bottom line: As a weight-loss aid, I think that coconut oil is not all it's cracked up to be. In general, I much prefer olive to macadamia nut oil, which lacks flavor and is very expensive.

Olive Oil Update

Last November, the FDA allowed manufacturers to claim on food labels that olive oil may reduce the risk of heart disease. The fine print further qualifies that this is based on "limited and not conclusive scientific evidence." To achieve this potential benefit, you need to get about 2 tablespoons of olive oil a day. And the idea is to include olive oil instead of, not in addition to, less healthy fats without boosting your daily calories. Some experts believe this health claim might apply to other oils besides olive that are also mainly composed of monounsaturated fats. Yet, I question whether these other oils are just as healthy, because olive oil has a rich fraction of antioxidants that the others lack.

Also in the news is the mislabeling and adulteration of olive oils. Some oils that say they are Italian may actually be Spanish, Greek, or Northern African in origin—they have just been packaged in Italy and shipped from there. Lawsuits have been filed against producers who blend olive oil with canola or another oil, or who misrepresent where the olives are grown or the oils come from.

Grapeseed. I use small amounts of this versatile, neutral-flavored oil that's pressed from grape seeds after wine has been made. It can withstand higher cooking temperatures better than other oils, but its main drawback is that it has more polyunsaturated fats than monounsaturated ones.

Best for: High-heat cooking, such as stir-frying, sautéing, and even baking.

High-oleic sunflower, safflower, and canola oils. I typically pass up sunflower and safflower oils because of their polyunsaturated fats. But these varieties are extracted from strains of seeds that are richer in oleic acid, which boosts their levels of monounsaturated fats and also makes them better suited for frying. Spectrum Organics makes some reliable products for home use. I'd avoid high-oleic oils made from genetically modified crops.

Best for: High-heat cooking or baking.

Sesame. While I generally avoid most polyunsaturated oils, I make an exception for dark-roasted sesame, which is richly flavored and popular in Asian and Middle Eastern cuisines. Use in dressings and add small amounts to finished soups and stir-fries.

Peanut. Ranging in flavor from mild to richly nutty, peanut oil contains about 50 percent monounsaturated fats but also 30 percent polyunsaturated. Use it occasionally for this reason. Buy only expeller-pressed varieties.

Corn. It's too high in polyunsaturated fats for my liking. Avoid deep-frying with it, since corn oil foams and smokes at high temperatures, and these fumes are highly toxic.

Soybean. Also called "vegetable oil," I think that soybean oil is too polyunsaturated for regular consumption, but it's often used commercially because it's cheap.

Nut (hazelnut, walnut). These pricey specialty oils are used as seasonings in cold dishes and salads; because they are highly unsaturated, never heat them. 

Six Supplements for Treating Depression

This past November, the University of Arizona hosted the Integrative Therapies and Depression conference, which was organized by my colleague Lewis Mehl-Madrona, MD, PhD. He and I and other experts spoke about natural treatments for clinical depression. My talk focused on some of the most popular and best researched herbs and supplements for treating this mental health condition. Here, I'd like to share with you the latest research on six of these supplements, along with advice on who may most benefit from them, what to look for when shopping, and how to take them.

Treating Depression, Naturally

If you're coping with clinical depression, you know that this disabling condition is much more than simply feeling blue. In fact, a diagnosis of depression requires feelings of profound sadness or loss of interest in everyday activities for at least two weeks, plus at least four of the following symptoms: a change in appetite or weight, an inability to sleep or oversleeping, restlessness, reduced energy, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, or thoughts of death or suicide. These symptoms must be severe enough to interfere with daily functioning.

Conventional medicine typically treats depression with antidepressant drugs, psychotherapy, or a combination of these two. I also recommend lifestyle approaches like regular exercise and dietary changes as part of a comprehensive program to help elevate mood. (For more lifestyle advice for treating depression, see the November 2002 issue.) Depending on depression's severity, I'm not opposed to the use of prescription antidepressants like selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). These drugs, including Prozac, Zoloft, and Paxil, appear to work by increasing the amount of the mood-boosting chemical serotonin available to brain cells. Such medications can be a godsend for people with severe depression, a serious condition that carries with it the risk of suicide and requires professional help.

But for mild to moderate depression, I believe the mood-boosting supplements discussed here—when combined with therapy and lifestyle measures—may be as effective as medications, without their side effects (like sexual dysfunction, agitation, and weight gain). I do have a few caveats: Unless otherwise noted, don't take these supplements with each other or with SSRI antidepressants, since doing so may excessively raise levels of serotonin, causing lethargy, confusion, and other symptoms. Women who are pregnant or nursing shouldn't take them without a doctor's approval, as their safety hasn't been tested in these patients. With the exception of B vitamins, I recommend using these supplements only under the supervision of a knowledgeable practitioner, who can help determine the best dose and monitor your progress. While it's probably safe to take these supplements indefinitely, I generally recommend getting off them within a year to see if you can maintain improvement on your own.

(By the way, I've previously recommended an amino acid called DL-phenylalanine, or DLPA, for people with depression, but believe there is now better evidence for the supplements discussed below.)

1 B vitamins. Studies have found that depressed people tend to have low blood levels of vitamins B-6, B-12, and folic acid, which are needed for the health of nerve cells and for the manufacture of chemical messengers like serotonin. Other research suggests that people who have higher blood levels of these vitamins (or who supplement with them) have more success when using antidepressant drugs.

Best for: Anyone with clinical depression.

How to take: Take one daily B-50 B-complex supplement. B vitamins are safe to take with conventional antidepressants and may actually help your body use the supplements 5-HTP and SAM-e more efficiently.

Side effects: None. (The vitamin B-2 in a B-complex supplement can turn your urine bright yellow, a harmless change.)

2 Fish oil capsules. Although more research is needed, studies suggest that countries with the highest fish consumption have the lowest rates of depression. One explanation might be that the beneficial omega-3 essential fatty acids found in fish are important components of cell membranes, especially those in the brain. Researchers suspect that increasing omega-3 levels makes it easier for serotonin to pass through the membranes of nerve cells in the brain, helping to regulate mood.

Best for: Anyone with clinical depression.

How to take: Although the most effective dose of fish oil has yet to be determined, I think it's best for people with depression to start with about 1,000 mg (1 gram) per day of a product providing both EPA and DHA. You can then work up to larger amounts. Choose a good quality product, such as Ultimate Omega from Nordic Naturals (to order, call 800-662-2544 or visit www.nordicnaturals.com). Because fish oil capsules may affect blood clotting, it's best to avoid them if you're taking anticoagulant drugs, have had a hemorrhagic stroke, or are anticipating surgery. Fish oil appears safe to take with other mood-boosting supplements and antidepressants. (Incidentally, I think it's still a good idea to eat fatty fish like wild Alaskan salmon a few times a week, but you will also need to supplement with fish oil to get the dose that's recommended here.)

Side effects: High doses of fish oil can cause belching and flatulence; you may be able to avoid these side effects by taking several smaller doses with food.

3 5-HTP. Known as 5-hydroxytryptophan, this natural compound is extracted from the seeds of an African shrub and appears to increase levels of serotonin and other mood-elevating brain chemicals. A number of studies have shown 5-HTP to ease symptoms of depression, in some cases as effectively as prescription antidepressants. Researchers

have noted that people seem to respond to 5-HTP within two weeks—unlike conventional antidepressants, which may take more than twice as long to achieve a therapeutic effect.

Best for: People who are not currently taking any other antidepressant supplements or medications and who want results quickly.

How to take: Practitioners experienced with this supplement typically recommend taking 50 mg of 5-HTP in tablet or capsule form three times a day with meals; if you don't see results after two weeks, it's okay to increase the dose to 100 mg three times a day. Take one of the doses with a B-50 B-complex supplement to help increase absorption.

Side effects: 5-HTP is related to L-tryptophan, a supplement that caused a sometimes fatal muscle disease in some people in the late 1980s. However, these problems were traced to a contaminant in the supplement, not the L-tryptophan itself, and no such problems have been found recently with 5-HTP. The practitioners I spoke with at the conference reported no ill effects in their patients who take 5-HTP. The only common side effect that I'm aware of is mild nausea, which is usually temporary.

4 Rhodiola. Also known as Arctic root, this tonic herb has long been used in Scandinavia and Russia as an energy booster. Rhodiola is also said to create a mildly uplifting feeling, and some research suggests it may benefit people who suffer from depression, apparently by increasing levels of mood-elevating brain chemicals like serotonin. Plus, the herb has been shown to help reduce fatigue and stress levels and improve sleep problems, all of which can accompany depression. Rhodiola appears to work faster than conventional antidepressants, often in less than a week, and it may enhance sexual energy as well.

Best for: People with clinical depression who want a mild antidepressant supplement that has some anti-stress benefits as well.

How to take: A dose of 100 mg of rhodiola two to three times a day is usually recommended for people with depression. Look for products labeled *Rhodiola rosea* and standardized to at least 3 percent rosavins and at least 0.8 percent salidroside. It is probably safe to take rhodiola with other mood-boosting supplements or antidepressant drugs.

Side effects: Some people find that rhodiola interferes with their sleep or causes vivid dreams, so you may want to avoid taking this herb around bedtime. Because rhodiola can have a stimulating effect, I don't recommend it to people who have bipolar disorder (manic depression). If taken on an empty stomach, you may burp up an unpleasant taste from a rhodiola capsule, so consider taking it with a meal.

5 St. John's wort. In Germany, this yellow-flowered herb is prescribed more frequently for depression than antidepressant drugs, and it's been a popular treatment for the condition here in the United States for the past decade. Although research suggests that St. John's wort doesn't help severe depression, numerous studies show that the herb is at least as effective as prescription antidepressants at easing mild to moderate depression. The exact mechanism is currently not known, but St. John's wort appears to boost the

brain's serotonin levels in much the same way that SSRI antidepressant medications do.

Best for: People who cannot take SSRIs because of their side effects, or who wish to wean themselves off these drugs (do so only under your doctor's supervision) and who aren't taking any of the medications below.

How to take: The standard dose of St. John's wort for treating depression is one 300 mg tablet or capsule, three times a day with meals, although some practitioners I've spoken with say that significantly higher doses may be optimal. Check with an experienced practitioner to determine the best dose for you. When shopping for St. John's wort, look for products that contain both hypericin and hyperforin, believed to be the herb's active ingredients.

Side effects: Although St. John's wort appears to have far fewer side effects than antidepressant drugs, reports suggest it may reduce the effectiveness of certain medications, such as indinavir (for HIV) and cyclosporine (for organ-transplant patients), by causing them to be metabolized too quickly. There is also concern that the herb may interact with some drugs used to treat asthma, cancer, and heart conditions, as well as birth control pills. I recommend that anyone who is taking either indinavir or cyclosporine avoid St. John's wort altogether, and that patients taking the drugs digoxin, theophylline, or warfarin in addition to the herb be monitored carefully by their physicians. As for women on the Pill, it makes sense not to use St. John's wort at the same time, or to switch to another form of birth control.

6 SAM-e. Short for S-adenosyl-methionine, SAM-e is a compound that's produced naturally in the body and which plays a role in various biochemical reactions, including the formation of serotonin and other brain chemicals. While evidence is mixed, some research suggests that supplemental SAM-e may be as effective as prescription antidepressants at easing depression and appears to work far more rapidly—often in less than a week. Plus, one recent preliminary study found that supplemental SAM-e helped enhance the effectiveness of SSRI drugs in people taking both.

Best for: People who cannot take SSRIs or who wish to wean themselves off these medications (under their doctor's supervision), or those who need a rapid-acting mood booster. If cost is an issue for you, I would recommend trying one of the other supplements mentioned here first, since SAM-e is quite expensive.

How to take: Take 400 mg of SAM-e twice a day on an empty stomach. I suggest using enteric-coated tablets of the butanedisulfonate form, the one that is most bioavailable. To increase absorption, take one of your doses of SAM-e along with a B-50 B-complex supplement.

Side effects: Side effects are rare, but may include mild stomach upset, dry mouth, and insomnia. SAM-e may be "activating," so avoid it if you have a history of mania or bipolar disorder. In addition, SAM-e's breakdown in the body is believed to create molecules of homocysteine, an amino acid in the blood that may increase the risk of heart disease in high amounts. To me, that's another good reason to supplement with vitamin B-complex—which lowers homocysteine levels—if you also take SAM-e. 

Ask Dr. Weil Nattokinase; Aspirin & Hearing; & More

What's your opinion of nattokinase, a soybean-derived enzyme that's being touted as a natural anticoagulant?

Nattokinase is an enzyme derived from natto, a fermented food made from soybeans that has been eaten in Japan for centuries and is considered a folk remedy there for cardiovascular disease. This enzyme is also sold in capsule form as a supplement that manufacturers bill as "nature's own clot-buster." Proponents claim that it helps support the body in preventing and dissolving blood clots and lowering blood pressure. I would not take nattokinase instead of anticoagulant drugs without more scientific evidence of its safety and effectiveness. So far, there have been only a few very small human studies of it—not enough to say it's proven, only that

it appears promising. Although nattokinase may work along a similar chemical pathway to dissolve clots as some anticoagulant drugs such as streptokinase and may lack the side effects of others like warfarin (Coumadin), I think that more research is needed on this supplement.

What can be done to prevent and treat precocious puberty? My daughter was just diagnosed with it.

Precocious puberty—the beginning of breast or pubic hair development or onset of menstruation in girls before age 7 or appearance of facial or pubic hair, deepening of the voice, or enlargement of the genitals in boys before age 9—is a condition requiring conventional approaches. (Puberty

Healing with Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy

When scuba divers surface too quickly, they can get "the bends" or decompression sickness, in which bubbles of gas form in the bloodstream and disrupt circulation. The standard treatment is hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT), which involves breathing in pure oxygen in a sealed chamber under increased atmospheric pressure. This reduces the size of the bubbles so they can be circulated to the lungs and expelled. But that's not all HBOT is good for: This painless and noninvasive treatment has proven effective for healing burns and complicated wounds, and I'm intrigued by anecdotal reports that it can be helpful for stroke rehabilitation and other neurological disorders.

How it works. The air pressure inside a hyperbaric chamber is gradually increased to two or three times normal atmospheric pressure, while the patient inhales 100 percent oxygen (normal air contains 21 percent oxygen). These conditions allow your blood to carry more oxygen and deliver it to the body's tissues, which may promote healing. HBOT can also enhance the growth of new blood vessels in damaged areas.

What to expect. Most hyperbaric chambers fit just one person,

who lies face up on a padded table. Such chambers may have porthole windows or be made out of clear, hard plastic. Other chambers hold six or more individuals, who remain seated and use face masks to breathe the oxygen; an attendant also stays inside to monitor the patients. As either type of chamber starts being pressurized, your ears may ache slightly, which is easily relieved by yawning or swallowing. Otherwise, you can read, sleep, or just relax. Sessions may last 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The number of sessions ranges from one or two for decompression sickness to 30, 40, or more (often several times a week) for wound healing and many other applications.

Who may benefit. In addition to decompression sickness, HBOT is also the standard therapy for carbon monoxide poisoning; in this case, flooding the body with oxygen forces the carbon monoxide out. It's also accepted as an adjunctive approach for burns, problematic wounds (such as a foot ulcer in someone with diabetes), crush injuries, bone infections (which sometimes develop after joint surgery), and bone or tissue damage caused by radiation therapy. For these conditions, this therapy is typically covered by health insurance.

The jury is out on whether HBOT is useful for stroke recovery, says Stephen Thom, MD, PhD, director of the Specialized Center of Research in Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy at the University of Pennsylvania. Still, I've heard of patients who have benefited when HBOT was begun soon after a stroke, and I think it's worth trying to promote the growth of new blood vessels in damaged areas of the brain. Some proponents claim this therapy can help other neurological conditions, including multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, and head injuries, although more research is needed.

Side effects. HBOT has few side effects, but possible ones include sinus pain, headache, and injuries to the middle ear or eardrums. Some people have temporary changes in vision after several sessions, but these should go away a few weeks after the sessions end. The most serious side effect is seizures due to oxygen toxicity, but this is very rare.

Finding a chamber. There are a few hundred HBOT facilities in the United States, mostly at larger hospitals and medical centers and at some private clinics. To find one near you, contact the Undersea and Hyperbaric Medical Society at www.uhms.org or (301) 942-2980. 

normally begins between ages 8 and 13 for girls and 9 and 14 for boys and lasts several years.) Precocious puberty is on the rise and is much more common in girls. While it may sometimes be the result of a pituitary tumor, most cases have no known cause. Some experts theorize that childhood obesity may trigger early puberty, while others believe that exposure to environmental estrogens and other chemicals in our food and water supply is to blame. More research is needed, but if that's true, we might be able to prevent precocious puberty by giving kids a diet of organic foods and by helping them to maintain a healthy weight.

I assume that your daughter's physician has already ruled out a tumor. Not all experts recommend drug treatment, but children with precocious puberty are at risk for short stature since they stop growing earlier than their peers (growth typically stops when puberty ends). If this concerns you, your daughter can be put on the injectable drug Lupron, which will delay puberty for as long as she takes it. In any case, the physical and emotional changes of precocious puberty can be upsetting to kids. Discuss your daughter's condition with her, offer support, and perhaps seek professional counseling if she seems to have a hard time coping with the early developments in her body.

I suffer from hearing loss and have read that aspirin can affect hearing. Can I take a daily baby aspirin for my heart?

Yes, you can. It's true that taking six or more regular aspirins (325 mg each) a day can lead to temporary ringing in the ears (tinnitus) and hearing loss, which usually disappear when the dose is lowered. The salicylate in aspirin is responsible for these side effects, and high doses of other salicylate-containing (but aspirin-free) pain relievers such as Arthritis and Bayer Select may pose similar problems. However, taking one baby aspirin (81 mg) a day to reduce your risk of heart disease should not affect your hearing.

Should women who are menstruating not do inverted yoga poses? Is downward dog an inverted pose?

There's no real consensus among yoga instructors on whether a woman should avoid inverted poses during her period. According to some experts, inverted poses like the headstand, shoulder stand, and plough pose may restrict the flow of menstrual blood and energy by turning the uterus upside down, so you shouldn't do them during menstruation. (Although downward dog also tilts the uterus, it may not be considered a truly inverted pose.) Other teachers believe that inversions may actually help alleviate heavy flow and painful periods.

I'm not aware of any scientific research to support either view, so I think that the choice is a personal one. Try experimenting to see how different yoga poses affect your energy levels and menstrual symptoms. Then you can do the ones that feel right to you. 

Alternatives to Painkillers

Since the painkiller Vioxx was voluntarily recalled last fall, three other painkillers have been linked to heart problems as well. The prescription COX-2 inhibitors Celebrex and Bextra—which work similarly to Vioxx—also seem to increase the odds of heart attack. And a study found that people taking the over-the-counter drug naproxen (Aleve) had a higher risk of heart attack and stroke than those taking a placebo. As we go to press, all three medications remain on the market, but doctors are cautioning people to limit their use. I think that's good advice; I recommend saving such drugs for short-term use and relying on an anti-inflammatory diet and herbal supplements like New Chapter's Zyflamend to ease chronic pain.

Meanwhile, other natural measures have also been shown to relieve pain. In a recent study, people with osteoarthritis (OA) of the knee who got regular acupuncture treatments for 26 weeks had a 40 percent improvement in pain and movement. This study of 570 people is said to be the most rigorous research ever done on acupuncture (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, December 21, 2004). Plus, in a study of 194 people with knee or hip OA, magnetic bracelets appeared to ease pain in people who wore them for 12 weeks, although it's not yet clear how magnets help relieve pain (*British Medical Journal*, December 18, 2004).

Sleep Less, Weigh More?

Getting less sleep can affect appetite-regulating hormones that could lead to weight gain, say two recent studies. In the larger trial, the sleep habits of some 1,000 people were examined over many years. Those who slept five hours or less a night not only weighed more than people who got eight hours of shut-eye, but had higher levels of ghrelin, a hormone that stimulates hunger, and lower levels of leptin, a hormone that suppresses appetite (*Public Library of Science Medicine*, December 7, 2004). A second study of 12 healthy men also found evidence of increased ghrelin and decreased leptin levels after just two nights with only four hours of sleep, plus the men craved more carbohydrate- and calorie-rich foods when sleep deprived (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, December 7, 2004).

Comment: The first study was the largest of its kind to show a significant relationship between sleep duration and metabolic hormones, and both studies suggest an intriguing link between inadequate sleep and overeating. I'm not surprised; scientists are just beginning to understand hormonal regulation of appetite. Even so, improving sleep has many benefits aside from perhaps helping protect against obesity. 

Vitamin E: An Update

Last November, the millions of Americans who take vitamin E to ward off heart disease and other conditions received some alarming news: A widely publicized report linked the supplement with an increased risk of death. It left people wondering if this antioxidant would help them lead longer, healthier lives or hasten their demise. To clear up the confusion, I'll answer some questions.

Are vitamin E supplements dangerous? No. The report's authors combined the results of 19 clinical studies and found that those who took at least 400 IU of vitamin E a day were slightly more likely to die than those who did not (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, November 10, 2004). However, most of the studies included elderly people who had chronic illnesses like cancer and heart disease, which would put them at an already higher risk of dying. These same findings may not apply to healthy people. Indeed, large population-based studies of healthy people have generally shown "no harm from vitamin E and a great deal of benefit," says Jeffrey Blumberg, PhD, a professor in the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University and a leading expert on vitamin E. (Several clinical studies looking at whether vitamin E can prevent disease in healthy people are now under way.)

My sole concern about vitamin E's safety involves its anti-coagulant effect, which is usually desirable. But taking the vitamin in conjunction with Coumadin, a blood-thinning drug, may raise the risk of excessive bleeding. If you're on Coumadin, talk to your doctor before taking vitamin E.

Can vitamin E protect against heart disease? Yes. Large population-based studies have found that taking vitamin E supplements can lower heart disease risk by about 40 percent. The vitamin may benefit your heart in many ways: It reduces the oxidation of LDL ("bad") cholesterol, inhibiting the formation of plaque in the arteries. It helps prevent blood clots. And it may dampen inflammation, now believed to be an underlying cause of atherosclerosis.

Clinical trials on vitamin E and heart disease have tended to have disappointing results, but most research has involved people who *already had* heart disease and were also taking several medications for their condition. So, vitamin E may be more effective at preventing heart disease in healthy people than influencing the course of existing heart disease, says Dr. Blumberg. Also, most clinical studies have used vitamin E in the form of synthetic alpha-tocopherol; other forms may have different effects.

Can vitamin E protect against cancer? Perhaps. In a 1998 study, male smokers who took vitamin E supplements

had 32 percent fewer cases of prostate cancer and 41 percent fewer deaths from prostate cancer than those not taking the vitamin. Based on these findings, a major study involving some 35,000 men is now investigating whether vitamin E, selenium, or both supplements can lower prostate cancer risk. Also, taking vitamin E may reduce the risk of bladder and colon cancer, although studies are mixed. It may lower cancer risk by protecting DNA from free-radical damage.

Can vitamin E prevent or treat other conditions? Yes. Vitamin E supplements have been shown to boost immunity and help protect against colds in older people. Research suggests they may help prevent Alzheimer's disease and slow its progression. Some (but not all) studies suggest vitamin E and other antioxidant supplements can reduce the risk of age-related eye disorders such as cataracts and macular degeneration. There's also evidence that vitamin E supplements can ease symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis and relieve menstrual pain, and some women with fibrocystic breast changes find that taking 400 IU of vitamin E daily can ease premenstrual breast tenderness.

Can I get enough vitamin E from my diet? Not easily. You can meet the Daily Value (DV) of 30 IU by eating foods like wheat germ, nuts, seeds, whole grains, vegetable oils, and fortified cereals. While that's enough to prevent deficiency, many of the studies showing that vitamin E can prevent or treat disease used 100 to 400 IU a day, levels hard to achieve through diet alone.

What form of vitamin E should I take? Vitamin E is a group of eight related compounds, four tocopherols and four tocotrienols (in both cases called alpha, beta, gamma, and delta). Many supplements contain only alpha-tocopherol, but scientists are learning that the different compounds may have different effects on the body. Gamma-tocopherol, for example, may play an important role in reducing the risk of prostate cancer, and tocotrienols may be especially protective against neurological disorders. That's why I recommend that you choose a product with mixed tocopherols *and* mixed tocotrienols. But such a product may be expensive and difficult to find. In that case, my next best choice would contain mixed natural tocopherols—the label should say "*d* [not *dl*] alpha-tocopherol with other tocopherols." The body uses natural vitamin E better than the synthetic form.

How much should I take? I advise taking at least 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and mixed tocotrienols daily, and at least 10 mg of that should be tocotrienols. If you're getting mixed natural tocopherols instead, take 400 IU daily. (I used to recommend 800 IU for those age 40 and older, but right now, it's unclear if this higher dose provides additional benefits.) Because vitamin E is fat-soluble, it's best taken with a meal containing some fat. 

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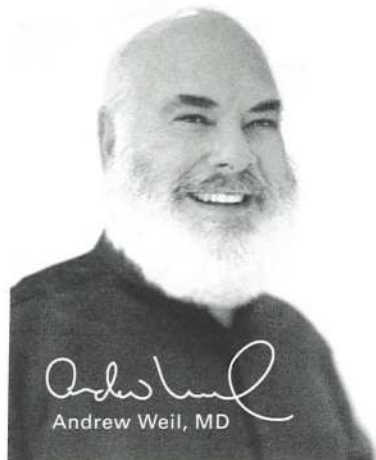
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CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

Catching On to Fish-Oil Supplements

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ON MY MIND:

Green Drinks

Green beer may be the drink of choice on St. Patrick's Day, but some people hope to toast good health year-round with plant-based "green drinks."

What they are. Such drinks include alfalfa juice, barley-grass juice, and wheat-grass juice, as well as beverages made from two types of freshwater algae: spirulina and chlorella. You can find ready-made drinks or powders at health food stores.

The claims. Marketers say that green drinks can do everything from increase energy and boost immunity to ward off heart disease and cancer.

The evidence. Although these beverages contain some minerals and vitamins, there is scant evidence in humans to support the health claims.

Bottom line. Green drinks are no substitute for eating green vegetables. My favorite green-colored drink is matcha, a powdered green tea. 

When a mainstream health organization like the American Heart Association (AHA) recommends fish-oil supplements to people with high triglycerides, it's truly a sea change. I believe we've turned the tide in thinking about these beneficial sources of omega-3 fatty acids, nutrients that are essential for the brain and the production of hormones, but are typically not consumed in sufficient amounts from food. Most Americans get too many omega-6 fatty acids (from vegetable oils) but not enough omega-3s (from oily fish, ground flax seeds, and walnuts). This imbalanced ratio may increase risks for heart disease, cancer, inflammatory disorders, and other conditions. For this reason, I advise cutting back on omega-6s while increasing omega-3s. This can be hard to do through diet alone, especially if you don't eat fish twice weekly. So people may turn to fish-oil supplements, available in capsules or liquid form.

Who may benefit. Fish and its oils can directly supply two important omega-3 fatty acids: EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid), which seems to have heart-protective effects, and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), which appears to benefit the nervous system. Some of the strongest evidence for fish oils is that doses of 2 to 4 grams daily of EPA and DHA combined may help reduce high triglycerides by 20 to 40 percent. This is the dose advised by the AHA, if taken under a physician's care. One gram (1,000 mg) is the typical daily dose suggested to help modestly reduce elevated blood pressure, and this amount is recommended by the AHA for those with existing heart disease. Some short-term studies suggest that at least 3 grams of omega-3s daily may help relieve symptoms of inflammatory conditions and autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. In addition, there's preliminary evidence that omega-3s may be beneficial along with conventional medications to treat depression

and schizophrenia and, in high doses, bipolar disorder, but more research is needed.

What to know. The most common side effects are nausea, diarrhea, a fishy aftertaste, and belching (sometimes caused by rancid oils). Since fish oils can decrease blood clotting, they shouldn't be taken by people with bleeding disorders or uncontrolled hypertension; also, avoid if you're scheduled to undergo surgery. People on anticoagulants like Coumadin or heparin should take fish oils only under a doctor's supervision. If you are taking regular aspirin or supplements with blood-thinning properties such as garlic or ginkgo, fish oils could theoretically increase the risk of bleeding. I am assured that the safety concerns about mercury or other contaminants in fish do not hold true for good-quality fish oils. The oils undergo a rigorous distillation process that removes most toxins, and they also come from species such as sardines, anchovies, salmon, or menhaden (a herring relative) that have lower mercury levels. Choose brands that can back up claims to be contaminant-free, like Nordic Naturals. I don't recommend cod liver oil instead of fish oils. Even though it's from a marine source, many brands of cod liver oil are too high in vitamins A and D, which can be toxic in excess amounts. And flaxseed oil doesn't appear to have the same therapeutic effects, either. As a plant-derived source of omega-3s, the body can convert only about 15 percent of it to EPA.

How to use. Instead of taking lots of capsules, I prefer the liquid form (which may be flavored lemon or orange) because I find it easier to use and more economical, especially for higher doses. It can be taken by the spoonful, placed on salads, or blended in a shake. Begin with a small daily dose (one-quarter teaspoon or one capsule) and slowly increase the dosage over time, taking it in divided doses with meals. Fish oils stay freshest and may avoid rancidity if refrigerated. 

In January, the federal government issued new dietary guidelines, which recommended more fruits and vegetables (9 daily servings), whole grains (3 servings), low-fat dairy products (3 servings), and exercise (at least 60 minutes most days to control weight). Unfortunately, physicians are vastly undereducated about nutrition and ill prepared to advise patients about popular diets, dietary supplements, and food's role in managing disease and optimizing health.

To encourage health professionals to include nutritional recommendations in their clinical practices, the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine holds an annual Nutrition and Health conference. This year's conference will take place in Tucson in early March and will explore the social, political, and behavioral aspects of diet and health. Designed for health care practitioners, this three-day program will include cooking demonstrations by chefs as well as food tastings so attendees can sample and learn some delicious and healthy ways to prepare food. I'm excited that the conference will cover such topics as the role of nutrition in arthritis, osteoporosis, and Alzheimer's disease, plus cutting-edge research on antioxidants, aging, and cancer prevention. There'll be plenty of food for thought . . . and discussion.

On March 6, the conference will host a public forum on food, politics, and society. I'll participate in this panel discussion along with experts on dietary supplements, agricultural policy, and obesity. Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door. To register, call (520) 626-2468 or visit http://integrativemedicine.arizona.edu/nutrition/2005/publicforum_reg.html.



Andrew Weil, MD

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Minding Your Bedside Manners

Knowing what to say and how to act when serious illness strikes a friend or loved one can be difficult. I think our culture doesn't train us to comfortably discuss illness, and our own fears might get in the way. So I'm grateful that Susan Halpern, a psychotherapist and person living with cancer, has written a thoughtful book called *The Etiquette of Illness* (Bloomsbury USA, 2004) to improve communication when someone faces a life-challenging diagnosis. Her advice:

Reach out. There is no one correct way to share your thoughts. You can express concern as "What is this like for you?" or even "I don't know what to say," which can spur conversation instead of avoiding the person or situation.

Accept tears. Crying is a natural way to release emotional tension and grieve. Tears should not be denied or cut short. They need little response other than, "Yes, this is very hard," "I'm here with you," "Go ahead," or "Take your time with your sadness."

Words aren't always needed. A smile, a hug, a touch, or simply your presence can all mean so much. Attentive listening is an important gift. Sitting with someone and

holding a hand is extremely reassuring. Or practice breath work together by breathing in good health for you and breathing out healing energy for the sick person.

Put it in writing. Cards are always welcome, and it's sometimes easier to express feelings in writing, such as "I'm sorry this is happening to you" or "I'm thinking of you."

For the person with the illness:

State your needs. Teach others what you find comforting and how to care for you. Be specific about what you need. For example, ask someone to shop, cook, do laundry, run errands, or read to you.

Be appreciative. If you're typically independent, it can be challenging to receive and gratefully accept the support of others. But this exchange of goodwill is a partnership in healing. For every kindness, say "Thank you" or "This means so much," especially when long-term help is needed.

Offer feedback. People might react from their own desires to fix, advise, and feel useful. Both caregiver and receiver must be honest about what works, saying "Was that OK?" or "That's enough or too much." ☸

Reading the Tea Leaves

Legend has it that trained monkeys were once used to pick the leaves from tea plants that grew on China's remote mountains. These days, it's much easier to get good quality tea, whether on the Internet or at specialty shops dedicated to this beverage. I think that's great, since studies show that tea has a multitude of health benefits. But with more than 3,000 varieties of tea, choosing the best kinds can be daunting. Here's a primer of the five major types of tea, from darkest to lightest.

Join the Tea Party

Whether black, green, or white, all hues of tea come from the same plant, *Camellia sinensis*. (The exceptions are herbal teas—like peppermint, chamomile, and rooibos, also called red “tea”—which aren't considered true tea by aficionados but “herbal infusions.”) In fact, the color of a tea depends on its processing method, particularly on how much oxidation it undergoes during production. In general, the less oxidized a tea, the lighter colored it is and the more polyphenols and other antioxidant compounds it may contain.

These polyphenols appear responsible for tea's many health effects. Studies show that tea drinkers in general have stronger bones, lower cholesterol levels, and lower rates of heart disease and cancer. Other research has pinpointed the benefits of specific colors of tea, as you'll learn below. The amount of tea required varies, but I recommend at least four cups a day. Choose loose leaf tea (rather than tea bags) when possible; it stays fresh longer and the quality is much higher.

Pu-erh. Pronounced *poo-air*, this dark red tea has a bold, earthy flavor that's said to be an acquired taste; it reminds me of coffee and tobacco. Still, it's highly valued in China,

Brewing the Perfect Cup

Here's how I brew tea:

- 1 For pu-erh, black, and oolong teas, heat good quality water to a vigorous boil. More-delicate green and white teas require water that is hot but cooler than boiling, since hotter temperatures may affect their flavor.
- 2 Pour water over tea leaves (loose or in a tea ball or strainer) and steep long enough to develop color and flavor but not so long that it tastes bitter. That's about 4 to 5 minutes for white tea, 2 to 5 minutes for pu-erh, black, and oolong teas, and between 1 and 3 minutes for green tea.
- 3 Add milk, honey or other sweeteners, or lemon if desired (they shouldn't affect the polyphenol content of the tea). You can reuse good quality tea leaves several times; some tea lovers say that the second brewing tastes better.

Do-It-Yourself Decaffeination

As a rule, all types of tea contain much less caffeine than coffee. But if you're sensitive to this compound, you may wish to choose decaffeinated varieties. Unfortunately, many teas are decaffeinated with chemical solvents, which also eliminate roughly 70 percent of the tea's healthful polyphenols. Instead, I recommend this simple trick, which will remove nearly 80 percent of the tea's caffeine while retaining most of its flavor and the majority of its polyphenols:

- Steep tea in hot water for 30 seconds. Caffeine is highly water-soluble, so most of it will be released into the water.
- Pour off and discard this liquid.
- Add fresh hot water to the tea leaves and steep as usual.

where its processing method has been a well-guarded secret for centuries. Unlike other teas, which get stale over time, pu-erh is said to mellow and improve with age like fine wine. It's the most oxidized form of tea.

Health benefits: Some research suggests that pu-erh may help reduce cholesterol and improve digestion.

Black. This hearty, amber-colored brew accounts for some 90 percent of tea consumed in the United States. It can range in flavor from nutty and spicy to fruity and almost flowery; popular varieties include Darjeeling and Earl Grey. Like most Americans, I enjoy iced black tea.

Health benefits: Preliminary studies show that black tea may help lower the risk of heart disease, fight colon cancer, and inhibit bacteria responsible for cavities and bad breath.

Oolong. Intermediate between black and green tea in color, flavor, and antioxidant activity, the aroma of oolong tea has been compared to fresh flowers or fruit.

Health benefits: Drinking three daily cups of oolong tea has been shown to relieve the itchy skin of atopic dermatitis.

Green. Newcomers often complain that green tea tastes “like hay,” but they may not be drinking quality brands. I like Japanese sencha, and especially enjoy a bowl of jewel-green powdered matcha tea every morning, which reminds me of my travels to Japan.

Health benefits: Rich in a polyphenol called EGCG, green tea may be the most researched tea, with preliminary studies suggesting that it may help prevent a host of cancers, lower cholesterol, fight inflammation, boost immunity, and (when applied topically) relieve sunburn. Green tea extracts are available, but these supplements may not have the same health benefits as the beverage.

White. This rare and expensive tea has a very delicate flavor. I find white tea almost too subtle for my taste, but enjoy it occasionally.

Health benefits: Because it's the least processed, white tea may contain more antioxidants than other teas. In a test-tube study, it inhibited DNA mutations (an early step in cancer formation) more effectively than green tea, while another study found it reduced the number of precancerous colon lesions in rats. Preliminary research suggests it's also effective at killing bacteria that cause pneumonia and cavities. 

The Best Nutrients for Stronger Bones

In October 2004, the US Surgeon General issued a report on the nation's bone health. The bad news is that by 2020, one in two Americans over age 50 may be at risk for fractures from osteoporosis (a disease of weakened bones caused by an imbalance in bone building and bone repair) or osteopenia (a condition of thinning bones that can lead to osteoporosis). The good news is that osteoporosis is not a natural part of aging. Indeed, it's preventable and treatable. Good nutrition, regular weight-bearing exercise, and proper supplementation can keep bones strong, and medications are available to treat osteoporosis before fractures occur. Because the condition produces no symptoms, the report called for bone density testing in women over 65 and anyone who breaks a bone after age 50. (For more on the report, visit www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/bonehealth.)

I'm pleased that the report spotlighted lifestyle measures to promote bone health, as I'll do here. Some ideas come from Karen Koffler, MD, director of the Integrative Medicine Program at Evanston Northwestern Healthcare in Glenview, Illinois, and Victoria Maizes, MD, executive director of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine.

A Guide to Vitamins and Minerals

Calcium and vitamin D are key nutrients for healthy bones, but many other vitamins and minerals can also benefit them.

Calcium. This mineral helps build bone mass during childhood and early adulthood and helps slow the rate of bone loss as you age. Women should get between 1,000 and 1,500 mg of calcium a day from food, supplements, or both. Men may want to get no more than the daily recommended intake of calcium (about 1,000 to 1,200 mg from all sources), because some research suggests a high intake of calcium may increase prostate cancer risk. (For children and teens, check with your pediatrician for recommended intakes.)

Dietary sources: Dairy products (choose reduced-fat varieties), collards, kale, broccoli, sardines and canned salmon with bones, dried figs, almonds, sesame seeds, and calcium-fortified products like orange juice, soy milk, tofu, and cereals.

Should you supplement? The typical American diet provides less than 600 mg of calcium a day, so I suggest you also supplement with calcium. Take your calcium supplements in divided doses of 500 mg each with meals for best absorption. Calcium citrate seems to be better absorbed than other forms, especially in older people. Avoid products made with oyster shell, bonemeal, or dolomite, all of which may be more likely to be contaminated with lead and other heavy metals. Also, I don't recommend coral calcium, a heavily marketed product whose many health claims simply aren't supported.

Vitamin D. Your body needs this vitamin to properly absorb and use calcium. In one study, daily vitamin D supplements increased the absorption of supplemental calcium by up to 65 percent (*Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, April 2003). Vitamin D is also called the "sunshine vitamin" because your body produces it when exposed to sunlight.

Dietary sources: Oily fish (like salmon and sardines) as well as fortified milk, soy milk, orange juice, and cereals.

Should you supplement? Many Americans (especially seniors and dark-skinned people) are deficient in vitamin D, so I encourage everyone to supplement. Most adults should take 400 IU daily (most multivitamins contain this amount), but seniors and those diagnosed with osteoporosis or osteopenia should take 800 IU. Some calcium supplements also include vitamin D. Take this fat-soluble vitamin with a meal.

Vitamin K. This vitamin helps build bone, slow bone loss, and speed the healing of fractures. Studies show that people who get more vitamin K in their diet are significantly less likely to break a hip than those who get less.

Dietary sources: Leafy greens, broccoli, and some oils (soybean, canola, and olive).

Should you supplement? Most people can get enough of this vitamin by eating leafy greens regularly. However, I suggest that people with osteoporosis or osteopenia take 50 to 100 mcg of vitamin K daily (most multivitamins contain far less), in addition to getting their greens. Take this fat-soluble vitamin with a meal. (Because vitamin K helps blood to clot, talk to your doctor about its effects—from food or supplements—if you take the blood-thinning drug Coumadin.)

Vitamin C. This antioxidant plays a role in collagen production, the first step in bone formation. There's some evidence that women whose diets are high in vitamin C have stronger bones.

Dietary sources: Citrus fruits, tomatoes, strawberries, cantaloupe, peppers, broccoli, and potatoes.

Should you supplement? Because of its wide-ranging health benefits, I suggest that everyone take 200 mg of vitamin C as part of a daily antioxidant regimen.

Exercise for Your Bones

Regular physical activity may be just as important to bone health as calcium intake and other nutritional factors. Exercise helps build strong bones, slow bone loss, and reduce your risk of falls. Aim for 30 to 60 minutes of weight-bearing exercise (like brisk walking, dancing, climbing stairs, or using a treadmill) most days of the week, as well as strength training two or three times a week. In addition, consider taking up tai chi or yoga, graceful forms of exercise that are also weight-bearing. Tai chi has been shown to improve balance, reduce the risk of falls and hip fractures in the elderly, and even slow bone loss in postmenopausal women. Yoga can also improve balance and flexibility. For more on exercise, see *Strong Women, Strong Bones* by Miriam Nelson, PhD, with Sarah Wernick, PhD (Perigee, 2001), and *Exercises for Osteoporosis* by Dianne Daniels (Healthy Living Books, 2004).

B vitamins. Three B vitamins—folic acid, B-6, and B-12—may help protect bones by lowering blood levels of the amino acid homocysteine. Elevated homocysteine levels are not only bad for your heart, but they're also linked with a much higher risk of bone fractures, according to studies reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (May 13, 2004). Researchers speculate that homocysteine might interfere with crucial chemical bonds within the bones.

Dietary sources: Beans, leafy greens, whole grains, citrus fruits and juices, and fortified cereals.

Should you supplement? For insurance, consider supplementing with Bs by taking a daily multivitamin (choose a brand with 100 percent or more of the Daily Value for folic acid, B-6, and B-12) or a B-50 B-complex supplement.

Magnesium. This mineral aids in bone formation, and more than 60 percent of the magnesium in the body is found in the skeleton. Studies show that people who get plenty of magnesium in their diet have denser bones.

Dietary sources: Leafy greens, whole grains, nuts, seeds, legumes, potatoes, and dairy products.

Should you supplement? Because calcium supplements can be constipating, I advise taking them with half as much magnesium, which acts as a mild laxative. For example, if you supplement with 1,000 mg of calcium per day, also take 500 mg of magnesium. Many calcium supplements include magnesium. People with impaired kidney function should not supplement with magnesium.

Potassium. This mineral helps regulate calcium absorption, and research shows that people whose diets are high in potassium have greater bone mineral density.

Dietary sources: Bananas, oranges, prunes, potatoes, acorn squash, and many other fruits and vegetables.

Should you supplement? You'll get plenty of potassium if you eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. Because high doses can cause abnormal heart rhythms, don't take potassium supplements unless your doctor recommends them (for example, if you're taking a diuretic that promotes potassium loss).

Trace minerals. Other minerals that are needed only in trace amounts, including boron, copper, manganese, silicon, and zinc, also play a role in bone health. In general, the best way to get them is to eat more produce, but they're also in many bone-health supplements and in some multivitamins. As for zinc, vegetarians get less of this mineral than omnivores, so they may benefit from taking 30 mg a day. Some calcium/magnesium supplements contain zinc as well.

How Diet Affects Your Bones

Besides eating lots of fruits, vegetables, and dairy products, here's more dietary advice for better bones.

Enjoy soy foods. Although research is mixed, some studies have found that soy foods protect bones. For instance, a recent trial showed that drinking two glasses of soy milk a day helps prevent bone loss (*European Journal of Nutrition*, August 2004). The phytoestrogen compounds in soy, called isoflavones, are thought to be responsible for these protective effects. I suggest getting a couple servings of whole soy foods each day, such as tempeh, green soybeans (edamame), roasted soy nuts, and calcium-fortified soy milk and tofu.

What about Drugs?

I know several women with mild osteopenia whose doctors encouraged them to start on bone-protective medications, but I generally recommend them only to people with osteoporosis or advanced osteopenia *in addition to* getting calcium, vitamin D, and exercise. Two commonly prescribed drugs are Actonel and Fosamax, both of which come in pill form and can be taken once a week. Recent research suggests Fosamax increases bone mineral density more than Actonel, without causing more side effects. The drug Evista may reduce breast cancer risk as well as protect bones, but can cause blood clots and hot flashes. A new, injectable drug called Forteo can reduce fracture risk in people with severe osteoporosis, but its long-term safety is unclear. Your doctor can help you decide which drug, if any, is right for you.

I would pass on the supplement ipriflavone, a synthetic isoflavone derived from soy. While small, early studies suggested it prevents bone loss, a larger, more recent trial found no such benefit, and the supplement reduced the number of infection-fighting white blood cells in some users.

Watch your salt intake. Salt increases the amount of calcium you lose in urine, and research suggests high-salt diets may increase bone loss in postmenopausal women. To cut back on salt, limit processed and fast foods, don't add salt at the table, and read food labels to make lower-sodium choices.

Avoid high-protein diets. Too much protein in your diet may increase urinary calcium losses, and animal protein may cause more calcium to be removed from bones than vegetable protein. I recommend that you get only 10 to 20 percent of your daily calories from protein, eat less animal protein (except for fish and reduced-fat dairy products), and eat more vegetable protein like soy and other beans.

Use alcohol only in moderation. Although moderate drinking has been linked to stronger bones, people who drink too much are more likely to have low bone density and experience fractures. High alcohol intake can reduce your body's ability to absorb calcium and also throw off your balance, increasing the risk of falling. If you drink, keep your intake moderate. That means no more than one drink daily for women or two drinks for men.

Limit caffeine. Consuming more than 400 mg of caffeine per day—the equivalent of four 6-ounce cups of coffee—is associated with lower bone mass in women and a higher risk of hip fracture. Caffeine may interfere with calcium absorption. If you drink coffee, try switching to tea. It has less caffeine, and research shows that people who drink black, green, or oolong tea regularly have higher bone mineral densities than those who consume these beverages less often. The flavonoids and fluoride in tea may enhance bone strength.

By the way, some studies suggest that regular consumers of colas and other soft drinks have a higher risk of bone fractures, but these effects may be due primarily to the replacement of calcium-rich milk with soft drinks. The phosphoric acid in sodas doesn't seem to be the problem. **SP**

Ask Dr. Weil Hemorrhoids; Microwaving Plastic; and More

I often get bleeding hemorrhoids, and over-the-counter and prescription drugs haven't helped. What else can you recommend? I'd like to avoid surgery.

These swollen blood vessels in and around the anus often result from straining during bowel movements, as well as pregnancy, a family history of hemorrhoids, aging, and chronic constipation or diarrhea. Hemorrhoids can be painful, itchy, and sometimes bleed, so I think the best step is to prevent them in the first place: Avoid straining or holding your breath on the toilet. Don't sit for long periods of time (on and off the toilet), and avoid heavy lifting. Pressure on the abdomen from extra pounds can cause hemorrhoids, so strive to maintain a healthy weight.

To treat hemorrhoids, take warm sitz baths (sit in a few inches of water) for about 15 minutes, several times a day, to minimize pain and itching. As you've discovered, over-the-counter remedies like Preparation H, aloe gel, and witch hazel won't cure hemorrhoids, but applying them to the affected area as needed can be soothing. I'd also avoid alcohol, coffee, and spicy foods, which can irritate sensitive tissues during a flare-up. Eating a high-fiber diet, drinking plenty of water, and getting regular exercise may help with constipation. Using an over-the-counter stool softener like docusate sodium (Colace) helps lessen pressure and straining with bowel movements. If you still find yourself suffering, don't rule out surgery: It can often be curative, and I'm not opposed to it as a last resort.

Five Ways Yoga Heals Chronic Back Pain

Chronic back pain is like a moody teenager, ready to flare up at any point or leave you alone—but generally stubborn and silently brooding. Ongoing back problems are often caused by bad posture, injuries, and poor body mechanics (how you sit, stand, lift, work, and sleep). Yet, I agree with John Sarno, MD, a rehabilitation medicine specialist at New York University Medical Center and author of *The Mindbody Prescription* (Warner, 1999), who suggests pain is strongly influenced by emotional factors, which can aggravate muscle tension. I believe yoga is a safe and effective way to bridge this mind-body gap and treat chronic back pain.

Right now, there are few published studies on yoga's benefits for back pain, which I attribute to its relative newness in our culture. Despite limited evidence, I'll discuss five reasons why yoga is therapeutic for your back. Before unrolling your sticky mat, get an accurate diagnosis from your doctor so that your yoga instructor can advise you if any poses should be modified or avoided.

Engages the whole body. Yoga helps on many fronts by integrating the body (postures), mind (breath work, focused concentration, and

relaxation), and spirit (self-discovery and inner wisdom). Through regular practice, participants feel more self-reliant and in control of back pain, and they gain powerful skills to ease its discomfort. Yoga should not hurt your back when it's done thoughtfully and gently. (If a pose produces sharp pain, numbness, or tingling, stop immediately.) Yoga works muscles from head to toe, and unlike other physical activities, it stretches and strengthens both sides of the body equally (back problems often affect one side more than the other).

Offers long-term prevention.

Other treatments for chronic back pain, such as massage, acupuncture, and pain medications, may provide only symptomatic relief and cost more. But yoga has a more lasting influence because it helps improve posture, teaches you relaxation techniques, and makes you mindful of everyday movements that affect your back. Back pain might not disappear, but yoga can make it more manageable and less intrusive.

Increases body awareness. Regular practice can make you more conscious of your balance and posture, including proper body alignment, as well as how to maintain your spine's natural curve, which can reduce or

prevent back pain. In addition, you may rethink how you sit, bend, and lift, actions that frequently misuse or abuse back muscles. By feeling more in tune with your body, you might notice and short-circuit the earliest signs of back strain.

Strengthens more than the back.

Strengthening weak abdominal and torso muscles and loosening up tight areas such as the hamstrings and hips can all help to support and relax your spine and ease back problems. Stretching increases blood flow to muscles in the back and elsewhere and can also lessen inflammation.

Soothes the mind. Learning to breathe slowly and deeply in each pose may benefit the back as much as doing the postures themselves. Yoga's calming and meditative effects relax tense muscles along with releasing stress and negative emotions, which can worsen back pain. And the balance that's needed to maintain many poses might extend to seeking more balance in your life.

Start by taking yoga classes from a qualified instructor to learn proper positioning and modifications. For home practice, two helpful videos are *Back Care Yoga for Beginners* with Rodney Yee and *Yoga: Your Freedom from Back Pain* with Lillah Schwartz. 

The labels on frozen dinners with plastic trays warn not to reuse the containers. If this is true, is it unhealthy to heat the food in the tray in the first place?

Possibly. When you microwave food in plastic containers or wraps, the microwave heating may drive plastic molecules into the food. I would remove the food from the tray and use a glass or ceramic dish instead, and I'd avoid using any plastic containers in microwave ovens. If you want to cover food to prevent splattering, use waxed paper or a paper towel rather than plastic wrap.

I'm a 62-year-old man who recently donated a kidney. Are there supplements or foods that I should take or avoid?

I'm not aware of any supplements that you should or should not take, but I do suggest drinking plenty of water, since dehydration stresses the kidneys. I'd also limit your intake of protein (less than 20 percent of total calories), tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine, all of which can irritate the kidneys. Plus, avoid rough contact sports that endanger your remaining kidney—boxing, football, hockey, soccer, and wrestling.

People with only one normal kidney typically have few health problems or no more problems than those who have two. In fact, studies show that the remaining kidney will continue to function normally and will even compensate for the loss of the one you donated. One caveat: You may have a greater risk of developing hypertension over time, so I recommend having your blood pressure checked once a year.

What's your opinion of bionic hydrotherapy, which is done on the feet to draw toxins from the body?

I think it's a scam. This practice—also known as ionic detoxification—involves resting your feet in a saltwater bath that is supposedly charged by a low-voltage current. But instead of producing an electric shock, the apparatus purportedly creates negative and positive ions (charged atoms). According to proponents, the electromagnetic stimulation helps release toxins through the many pores in the soles of your feet over the course of a 20- to 45-minute soak, and the water of the footbath may change colors as these are excreted from your body. Offered at spas and by alternative practitioners, ionic detoxification is claimed to increase energy, improve sleep, and improve health conditions ranging from allergies to fibromyalgia. Multiple sessions, which may cost about \$30 each, are often recommended.

I'm not aware of any clinical evidence that ionic detoxification can accomplish these things, and the sense of well-being that people say they feel afterward may simply occur because soaking your feet can be relaxing. The change in the water's color has been shown in some experiments to be the result of rust from the bath's metal electrodes or chemical reactions between the saltwater and your skin's oils, not "toxins." My advice: Save your money. 

Exercise Away Depression

Walking on the treadmill or riding a stationary bike for half an hour several times a week may be as beneficial in treating mild to moderate depression as taking antidepressant medication or receiving cognitive-behavioral therapy. Researchers in Texas found that of 80 adults, those who got at least 30 minutes of moderately intense aerobic exercise three to five times a week had roughly a 50 percent decline in depressive symptoms after three months. Those who did lower-intensity aerobic workouts or stretching for similar amounts of time had a 30 percent reduction. This is the first study to show that exercise alone produces comparable effects to psychotherapy or medications for milder forms of depression. (*American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, January 2005)

Comment: These results are consistent with my clinical experience and my advice for treating depression. Exercise has everything—it's a natural mood lifter and improves health in numerous ways—to recommend it over antidepressants. So I'm delighted to see that research is corroborating its value in treating milder forms of depression.

Herbal Help for Migraines

An extract of the herb butterbur can significantly reduce the frequency of migraine headaches, according to a recent study. Researchers at New York's Albert Einstein College of Medicine and elsewhere gave 245 migraine sufferers either 50 or 75 mg of butterbur (as the brand Petadolex) or a placebo pill twice daily. After four months, people taking the higher dose of butterbur saw their monthly number of migraine attacks reduced by 48 percent, compared to 36 percent for those taking the lower dose and 26 percent for those on the placebo. Researchers say that these results are comparable to those seen with prescription migraine preventive drugs. (*Neurology*, December 28, 2004)

Comment: Although I don't have much experience with butterbur, I've been following the research on it, and this study makes me more likely to recommend the herb to migraine patients. Butterbur may work by reducing inflammation and spasms in blood-vessel walls and appears to be free of major side effects; the most common adverse reaction reported by users in this study was burping. 

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Four "Fad" Diagnoses

Are you feeling run-down or irritable, or have headaches, gastrointestinal woes, or trouble sleeping? Virtually everyone experiences such vague symptoms from time to time. If your doctor has ruled out serious illness, you're probably healthy. But according to some alternative practitioners, you could be suffering from intestinal parasites, adrenal fatigue, or another so-called fad diagnosis.

I know it can be tempting to attribute life's aches and pains to an exotic-sounding condition. But by doing so, you may end up worrying unnecessarily and spending time and money on useless treatments for diseases that may not exist. If you think you have one of the conditions below, I advise getting a conventional workup to rule out any real illness.

Adrenal fatigue. Located atop the kidneys, the adrenal glands produce hormones that help your body function normally. Some alternative practitioners claim that constant stress can cause the adrenals to "burn out" and stop producing sufficient amounts of these hormones, leading to fatigue, food cravings, and other vague symptoms. Adrenal fatigue is typically diagnosed with unreliable salivary hormone tests or a symptom questionnaire and treated with herbal supplements and glandular extracts.

My take: True adrenal insufficiency is usually a result of the autoimmune condition Addison's disease, which can be life-threatening and requires continual treatment with steroid medication. But I doubt that everyday stresses can lead to "adrenal fatigue," and I'm wary of the supplements used to treat it. Such supplements may contain ginseng and other tonic herbs that protect against stress. But another common ingredient, whole licorice, appears to have properties similar to steroids—including their negative side effects, like increased blood pressure. (It can be a very useful botanical medicine, but it should be used under the supervision of a knowledgeable practitioner.) Some products also contain animal glandular concentrates, which probably won't help and could theoretically carry a risk of transmitting mad-cow and related diseases. If you want to boost energy and relieve stress, eat a wholesome diet, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, and practice relaxation techniques like breath work.

Candida overgrowth syndrome (COS). The yeast known as *Candida albicans* is normally present in small amounts in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract and vagina and is kept in check by "good" bacteria. But when antibiotic use, poor diet, or a suppressed immune system disturbs your body's balance of good and bad bacteria, *Candida* may thrive, resulting in vaginal yeast infections, intestinal upset, or oral thrush. Some

practitioners believe that *Candida* overgrowth can become systemic, causing chronic problems like GI distress, fatigue, and mood swings, which they may diagnose with a symptom questionnaire. COS is typically treated with antifungal drugs, various supplements, and a sugar-free diet.

My take: I'm not convinced that COS is real. If *Candida* were truly systemic, you'd be critically ill. Still, if you believe you've got COS, I think it's fine to use the antifungal drug nystatin (which isn't absorbed into the bloodstream), probiotic supplements, and a low-sugar diet. (Avoid stronger antifungal drugs like Nizoral and Diflucan, which can be toxic.) If you don't improve after six weeks, you may not have COS.

Intestinal parasites. Some people claim that about 85 percent of Americans have intestinal parasites, which supposedly cause arthritis, cancer, GI troubles, insomnia, and other conditions. Some practitioners diagnose parasites with questionable lab tests and treat them with cleansing supplements containing black walnut, wormwood, and other herbs that supposedly expel "parasites"—in truth, simply food particles or the like—in your stool.

My take: The true number of Americans with parasites is far lower than claimed, and there's no evidence that they are responsible for the conditions mentioned above. Unless you have recently traveled to a developing country or been exposed to someone with highly contagious pinworms—in which case you should see a conventional doctor—you probably don't have parasites. If you're still convinced you have parasites, see a reputable doctor for testing, and don't waste your money on ineffective herbal cleansers.

Wilson's syndrome. "Discovered" by a doctor named Wilson whose license has since been revoked, Wilson's syndrome supposedly stems from low thyroid function, even though patients typically test normal in blood tests. It's diagnosed if your body temperature averages lower than 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, and it has some 37 "symptoms" including everything from fatigue and irritability to allergies, hair loss, and "low ambition." Wilson's syndrome is typically treated with the thyroid hormone triiodothyronine (T3) and various dietary supplements.

My take: I don't think Wilson's syndrome exists. Research suggests that most people don't usually have a body temperature of 98.6 degrees, so an average reading that is slightly lower means nothing. And while some symptoms of Wilson's syndrome are indeed signs of true hypothyroidism, many of them are vague enough to be attributed to any number of other conditions, like depression, anxiety, stress, and even life itself. According to the American Thyroid Association, there's no scientific evidence to support the existence of Wilson's syndrome, and treatment with high doses of T3 may be dangerous. **SP**

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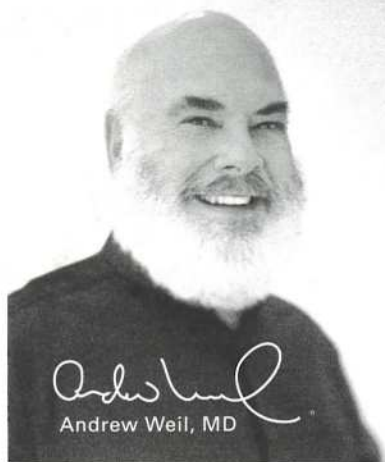
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ON MY MIND:

Laughter

April Fool's Day is a great time to lighten up and remember that laughter is often the best medicine. I think it's one of the most effective ways to reduce stress, and preliminary research suggests laughter may also boost immunity, relieve pain, lower blood sugar in people with type 2 diabetes, and help protect against heart disease.

Join the club. After reading about laughter's healing properties, a physician in India started a laughing club in 1995. The idea was infectious: There are now several hundred clubs worldwide, including about 100 in North America. Members meet not to crack jokes, but to "laugh for no reason." An instructor leads the group in a series of exercises that get people giggling, and what begin as forced chuckles soon turn into genuine yuks. To find a club, visit www.laughterclubs.com or call (800) 669-5233. 

Knowing your levels of CRP, which stands for C-reactive protein, may be as valuable as knowing your blood pressure and cholesterol levels. New research keeps hinting that high levels of CRP, a marker of inflammation that's measured by an inexpensive blood test, may help predict the risk of heart disease and stroke. With chronic, low-grade inflammation now considered a root cause of cardiovascular disease, scientists are exploring if reducing CRP levels can help prevent disease and save lives.

CRP is a protein made by the liver that many cardiologists feel is at least as important as cholesterol, and possibly more important. Not everyone agrees. My colleague Joseph Alpert, MD, a cardiologist and chairman of the department of medicine at the Arizona Health Sciences Center, sees value in testing for CRP and reducing elevated levels, yet he considers CRP less important in driving the atherosclerotic process than such major risk factors as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and smoking.

The latest thinking. CRP levels reflect the inflammatory process in the body and may indicate whether plaque buildup in blood vessels supplying the coronary arteries or brain might be unstable and rupture, causing a heart attack or stroke. Research shows that people with low cholesterol but high CRP levels are as likely to have a heart attack as those with high cholesterol but low CRP. Two studies in the January 6, 2005 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* suggest CRP may be as important as cholesterol in determining cardiovascular risk. The studies, both of which involved people with existing heart disease, found that lowering CRP levels with statin drugs—independent of lowering cholesterol—can reduce the chance of recurrent heart attack and stroke and can slow the progression of atherosclerosis. (The studies were funded by statin drug makers.)

Who needs testing? CRP testing is not suggested as a widespread screening for all

adults and is not recommended for those at low cardiovascular risk. If you're already at high risk, you'll likely be tested but a high CRP may not change your doctor's treatment advice, which typically includes medications plus dietary and other lifestyle measures.

CRP might make the biggest difference to those at moderate risk, meaning someone with a 10 to 20 percent chance of developing cardiovascular disease in the next 10 years, based on current health status and history. High CRP levels might tip the odds in favor of treatment to help fend off later problems.

My bottom line. I would be concerned if everyone with high CRP were prescribed statins. While these drugs have cholesterol-lowering and anti-inflammatory properties, popping a pill doesn't help people learn how to lead a heart-healthy lifestyle. Plus, statins are expensive and can have side effects.

My top recommendation for those with high CRP levels is an anti-inflammatory diet, which limits saturated and polyunsaturated fats and eliminates trans fats. I'd use mono-unsaturated-rich olive oil as my primary cooking oil. Limit high glycemic load carbohydrates, like foods made with flour or sugar. They tend to cause spikes in blood sugar, which foster abnormal reactions between proteins and sugars, resulting in pro-inflammatory compounds. Plus, I advise eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, substituting more fish and plant-based proteins (from beans and soy foods) for meat and poultry, and seasoning more meals with turmeric and ginger, spices with anti-inflammatory properties. Getting regular physical activity, losing excess weight, not smoking, and practicing relaxation techniques are other effective ways to reduce CRP and protect your heart—perhaps eliminating the need for medications or limiting your dependence on them. Low-dose aspirin therapy may also help lessen inflammation, and some people may wish to take red rice yeast supplements as natural sources of statins. 

At last year's TIME/ABC News Summit on Obesity, I presented a plan called "8 Weeks to Maximum Obesity." It was intended to get laughs and get people thinking about issues that weren't being acknowledged. Government officials claimed obesity is a matter of individual responsibility, while big food companies said they're just giving consumers what they want. Here is my plan:

Week 1: Consult your doctor, who probably learned little about nutrition in medical school and will just say to eat a balanced diet. Get a low-quality meal in the medical center cafeteria.

Week 2: Spend more time snacking in front of the TV and computer. Practice eating unconsciously: Whenever you find your attention on the food, bring it back to the screen.

Week 3: Stock the pantry with processed, refined, packaged food, then start using it. You'll take in the kinds and amounts of fats and carbohydrates that tend to put weight on quickly.

Week 4: Eat out more at restaurants with oversized portions or all-you-can-eat buffets.

Week 5: Let the kids plan the menus. Cartoon figures in ads and on packages will guide them to the most fattening choices, like sugared cereals, soft drinks, and snack foods.

Week 6: Eat in your car. Visit fast food outlets, and get drive-through service to avoid walking.

Week 7: Fly the friendly skies, where you'll only get soft drinks and skimpy snacks made with partially hydrogenated oils, so get plenty of takeout from airport food courts.

Week 8: Go on a diet. It doesn't matter which one or for how long. You'll likely gain back any weight and then some when you go off it.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored nine books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

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Acupuncture for Seasonal Allergies

The return of spring is one of my favorite times of year, but it can be miserable for people with hay fever (allergic rhinitis). I often suggest taking the supplement quercetin on a preventive basis and the herb stinging nettle to treat symptoms as well as eating an anti-inflammatory diet. (For more, see the April 2004 issue.) Another approach you might consider in addition to or in place of these measures is acupuncture, which has shown promise in recent research.

The evidence. Small studies in both adults and children have found that regular acupuncture sessions are more effective than fake acupuncture at easing nasal allergy symptoms. Other research has used a combination of acupuncture and Chinese herbs. In a German study of 52 adults with hay fever, half underwent weekly acupuncture sessions while taking a Chinese herbal formula three times a day (both approaches were tailored to each person's symptoms), and the other half received fake acupuncture and took a nonspecific herbal formula. After six weeks, the severity of hay fever was "significantly less pronounced" in the group that got the real treatments (*Allergy*, September 2004).

How it may help. Hay fever is caused by an exaggerated immune response to otherwise harmless airborne pollens from various plants and trees. There's some evidence from other research that acupuncture can influence immune function. From a Chinese medicine perspective, acupuncture can correct imbalances in the body's flow of vital energy (or *chi*) that contribute to hay fever and other ailments. My friend Ken Rosen, a licensed acupuncturist based in Huntington, New York, says acupuncture is useful for both preventing and treating allergy flare-ups, so it's best to start treatments before or early in allergy season.

What to expect. If you're seeking relief from active symptoms, you should notice improvement after just one acupuncture session, according to Rosen, although you may need several sessions throughout allergy season for optimal results. Some practitioners may also recommend Chinese herbs, dietary changes, and other lifestyle measures. I advise working with an acupuncturist who is experienced in treating allergies. To locate acupuncturists in your area, visit www.nccaom.org or www.aacom.org. 

A Taste of Turmeric

Turmeric is a spice with a past—used for thousands of years by billions of people. It's a staple in the diets of Indian and Asian cultures, where it's also a traditional herbal remedy for everything from digestive problems and liver damage to arthritis and wounds (when applied topically). Nowadays, modern medicine is taking notice of this ancient herb's healing properties, and turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) is capturing lots of research interest as both a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory. Scientists are excited by studies suggesting its potential to counter inflammation and oxidative damage, two processes thought to be involved in many of the greatest health challenges facing an aging population, including cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's disease, to name a few. That's why some have dubbed turmeric "the spice of life." Westerners know it as the ingredient responsible for the yellow color of curry, and it's also a major ingredient in American mustard.

Botanically, turmeric belongs to the ginger family, and curcumin, one of its most medicinally active compounds, comes from the plant's underground stem (rhizome). Turmeric can be found in the spice section of the supermarket and at health food stores, where the extract is also sold as a supplement in capsule or liquid form. (It's also included in some remedies that blend several herbal extracts, such as the natural anti-inflammatory Zylamend.) When added to foods, turmeric has a distinctive taste and can be bitter in large amounts. It's hardly the mainstay here that it is in India, where it's eaten at most meals in soups, rice, beans, or vegetable dishes, or in Okinawa, where it's consumed regularly as a cold tea. Its culinary aspects aside, turmeric has significant health benefits; most of the evidence to date comes from lab and animal studies, with human research in preliminary stages or coming from India. In the meantime, there is little harm and some benefits from cooking more with turmeric. (I'll share one of my recipes with turmeric here.)

Easing inflammation. In animal and lab studies, some of which were done at the Center for Phytomedicine Research at the University of Arizona, curcumin has been impressive at reducing inflammation. As a natural anti-inflammatory, it's safer and lacks many of the side effects of conventional pain relievers, and may possibly work on more chemical pathways than existing medications to slow certain diseases. Based on early studies, it seems most promising for treating rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, and inflammatory bowel disease and also for lowering cholesterol, but human testing is needed.

Preventing cancer. Most of the research has been done in the lab or on animals and suggests that substances in turmeric might prevent or slow tumor growth in cancers of the prostate, liver, bladder, breast, and colon. Small, preliminary human cancer studies are under way.

Reducing Alzheimer's. Some of the lowest rates of Alzheimer's disease in the world are in India, which may be partly due to regular consumption of turmeric there. This has sparked even more interest in the spice, and now some

Pink Lentil Curry

Pink lentils may be purchased in an Indian grocery or international food store. You can also substitute another variety of lentil to make this tasty entrée or side dish.

1 pound pink lentils,
picked over and rinsed
1 tablespoon expeller-
pressed canola oil
1/2 cup carrots, chopped
1/2 cup celery, chopped
1 cup onion, chopped
1 cup cabbage, chopped
3 cloves garlic, crushed
1 tablespoon gingerroot,
chopped
salt or soy sauce, to taste
1 tablespoon curry powder
1 teaspoon turmeric powder
4 cups rice

per serving:	
calories	483
carbohydrates	90 g
protein	24 g
fat	4 g
fiber	18 g

- Place lentils in a pot with enough water to cover well. Bring to a boil, lower heat, and cook partially covered, until lentils become mushy (about one hour).
- Meanwhile, heat oil in skillet; add vegetables and a little water, stir and cover. Cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are barely tender.
- Add curry powder, turmeric powder, garlic, and ginger. Simmer covered until vegetables are tender.
- Add vegetables and soy sauce (or salt) to lentil mixture. Simmer for 10 minutes to blend flavors.
- Serve with rice. Serves 6.

promising research from UCLA done on elderly lab mice, whose diets were supplemented with curcumin, found that the compound crossed the blood-brain barrier and the mice's brains had fewer amyloid protein deposits, one of the hallmarks of this neurodegenerative disease. These same scientists also found that when they added low doses of curcumin to human amyloid proteins in a test tube, the compound not only prevented the formation of Alzheimer's plaques, it also broke down existing plaques, suggesting turmeric might be helpful both as an Alzheimer's preventive *and* treatment (*Journal of Biological Chemistry*, February 18, 2005). These UCLA researchers have recently begun a small human clinical trial of curcumin at high doses in Alzheimer's patients.

Taking supplements. My suggested dose is 300 to 400 mg of turmeric taken up to three times per day by those with inflammatory conditions, liver disease, or cancer, or 400 mg daily for those with a family history of Alzheimer's. One reliable product is Turmericforce from New Chapter.

In very high doses, turmeric may cause stomach upset, and the supplement should be avoided by people with bleeding disorders, bile-duct obstructions, gallstones, and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding (it's safe for culinary use). Those taking blood-thinning medications or supplements (like vitamin E or ginkgo) should be cautious when using supplements containing turmeric, since they may increase the risk of bleeding. 

fast fact

The forehead mark worn by some Hindu women is created by mixing turmeric with lime juice.

Is Aging Caused by a Power Failure?

Some signs of aging are noticeable: Your hair may get grayer, your skin becomes wrinkled, and your memory isn't quite what it used to be. But the exact trigger for such effects has long been elusive. Now, studies are piling up that lead many scientists to believe that a major cause of aging is buried within tiny elements of cells, called mitochondria. It's an idea I find intriguing, especially since research suggests that two dietary supplements may help bolster mitochondria and possibly stave off age-related declines.

Like miniature power plants, mitochondria generate energy within the body's cells. But as they burn carbohydrate, fat, and protein by combining with oxygen, mitochondria also release free radicals as byproducts. Ironically, these active molecules target the very mitochondria that produce them and damage the DNA they contain. In turn, the mitochondria release more free radicals, setting up a vicious cycle that worsens over time. Such mitochondrial damage, some scientists believe, may be responsible for the signs of aging and play an important role in diseases associated with getting older, like heart disease and cancer.

Although researchers have long suspected such a link, there had been little proof to back up this idea. In fact, it was unclear whether free radicals actually caused aging, or simply increased along with it. That began to change last year, when Swedish scientists published a study of lab mice that were genetically engineered to have defective mitochondria. These mice showed signs of premature aging like baldness, osteoporosis, and enlarged hearts, and they only lived a little less than a year, compared to healthy mice, who typically live at least twice as long (*Nature*, May 27, 2004). I think this study is extremely important, since it's the first hard evidence to support the mitochondrial theory of aging. Some animal and human studies have already linked mitochondrial damage to degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and type 2 diabetes.

Rats That Get Up and Dance

Because such experiments are understandably difficult to undertake in humans, the next step for researchers is to see if drugs, diet, or genetic alterations in lab mice can counteract the problem of mitochondrial damage. In recent years, scientists have shown that caloric restriction—taking in far less food than usual—can extend life in animals. But caloric restriction is too unappealing and impractical in humans for it to be widely adopted. (For more information on caloric restriction, see the March 2004 issue.)

Instead, one group of researchers has turned their attention to a pair of dietary supplements and their role in aging. Led by Bruce Ames, PhD, a renowned biochemist at the University of California, Berkeley, they've investigated the potential of acetyl-L-carnitine and alpha-lipoic acid to slow the aging process in rats.

Acetyl-L-carnitine (also called ALCAR) is an amino acid derivative that helps mitochondria produce energy, as does

the antioxidant alpha-lipoic acid (ALA). Our bodies normally manufacture both ALCAR and ALA, which are essential to mitochondrial functioning, but in decreasing quantities as we age. ALA is found in foods such as spinach, liver, and brewer's yeast, while ALCAR is produced naturally in the brain. However, supplements are needed to get the doses recommended below. Ames and his team theorize that supplementing with ALCAR and ALA could also help protect mitochondria against free radical damage—in short, promoting cell function and health.

In three studies published in the February 19, 2002 issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, these researchers showed that elderly lab rats fed a combination of ALCAR and ALA in their chow and water functioned at levels typically associated with much younger animals. In experiments, the rats were more energetic and performed better on memory tests than those not fed the supplements. In Ames's words, the aging rats given ALCAR and ALA were so peppy that they "got up and did the Macarena."

Time in a Bottle?

The idea of line-dancing rodents can be entertaining, but what do these findings mean for people? Although the rat studies are very promising, it may be a leap to apply those results to humans. Still, Ames has been so impressed with this evidence that he developed a commercial supplement called Juvenon containing ALCAR and ALA and founded a company to sell it. You can also find ALCAR and ALA separately at health food stores and online.

Ames receives no profits from sales of Juvenon and has said that the money instead is used to fund clinical trials. Indeed, small studies in humans are under way. One such study, at Boston University Medical Center, recently looked at the effects of Juvenon on about 40 older people with heart disease. Since atherosclerosis has been linked to oxidative damage from free radicals, researchers believe that Juvenon might improve the ability of blood vessels to expand by reducing free radical activity and improving mitochondrial function. Although the research is complete, the results haven't been released yet. Another upcoming clinical trial plans to study the effects of Juvenon on healthy older people with age-associated memory problems.

But some people aren't waiting for more human studies before supplementing. I think the animal research is promising enough that I currently take 500 mg of ALCAR and 200 mg of ALA twice a day. (These are the same doses used in Juvenon.) I haven't yet noticed an increase in energy or any other results, but I think these supplements, which may offer different benefits than other antioxidants, may be worth taking as insurance against diseases of aging. They can be pricey, but appear free of significant side effects. Meanwhile, I continue to recommend other, proven ways to maintain your health as you age: Exercise regularly, eat a wholesome diet, keep your mind active, and manage stress. 

Easing Insomnia: 6 Steps to Sounder Sleep

We need sleep more than we realize, and not just to rest the body and mind or because a lack of sleep raises the risk of accidents and injuries. Inadequate sleep also lowers immunity, and studies suggest it may hasten the onset of depression, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Although some people can get by on less shut-eye, many others crave more: Thirty-five percent of US adults experience insomnia every night or almost every night, according to one poll. (Insomnia means having trouble falling or staying asleep, waking up too early in the morning, or waking up feeling unrefreshed.)

While many people turn to sleeping pills, these drugs can be addictive, and I think they tend to create poor-quality sleep. What's more, I've found that most cases of insomnia can be successfully treated with lifestyle changes and other natural approaches, which I'll discuss below. Some ideas come from Rubin Naiman, PhD, a Tucson-based psychologist who specializes in sleep disorders and teaches at the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine. (If you have frequent insomnia, your doctor can determine if an underlying medical or psychological problem is responsible and needs treatment.)

Balance light and darkness. Naiman argues that variation in the amount of light we're exposed to throughout the day has a major influence on the sleep/wake cycle. "Most people are underexposed to light during the day," he says. "Even on cloudy days, natural outdoor light is much brighter than what you get in a well-lit room. Get outside!" He thinks we also need to get more darkness at night. The pineal gland secretes melatonin, our sleep-inducing hormone, with the onset of darkness. You can encourage this natural process: About an hour before going to bed, dim your lights and also avoid television's bright glare. When you're ready to sleep, try to keep your bedroom completely dark.

Practice good sleep hygiene. Go to bed and get up at about the same time every day, even on weekends. Use your bed for sleeping and sexual activity only. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine, especially at night. Don't eat or drink too much close to bedtime. Establish relaxing bedtime rituals, like taking a warm bath, listening to gentle music, or practicing a relaxation technique. Make sure your bed is comfortable. Use a white-noise machine to mask bothersome noise. If you can't fall asleep within half an hour of going to bed or waking during the night, go into another room and read or do a quiet activity using dim lighting until you're sleepy.

Get regular exercise. Studies show that people who are physically active sleep better than those who are sedentary. The more energy you expend during the day, the sleepier you will feel when it's time to go to bed. Get at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity (like walking, swimming, or cycling) on most days of the week, but try to limit vigorous exercise within three hours of bedtime, which may increase alertness. In addition, consider taking up tai chi or yoga: Recent studies suggest that regular practice of these calming forms of exercise can ease insomnia.

A Note on Napping

Sleep expert Rubin Naiman doesn't recommend napping to people with insomnia, because taking naps may make it more difficult for them to fall asleep at night. However, he thinks that a 15- to 20-minute afternoon nap is a good idea for everyone else, and I agree. (Longer naps may leave you feeling sluggish.) People who nap generally enjoy better mental health and are more alert than people who don't. When my schedule permits, I'll take a brief nap in the afternoon, preferably lying down in a darkened room, and I'll wake up feeling refreshed.

Practice relaxation. If your mind is too active at bedtime, you won't be able to fall asleep no matter how tired you are. Doing a relaxation technique like breath work, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation can help you disengage from thoughts and drift off to sleep. A recent study suggests how these approaches may help: Researchers measured the brain waves of people while they were practicing relaxation techniques, and found brain-wave patterns similar to the early stages of sleep (*Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, December 2004).

Consider natural sleep aids. In addition to the lifestyle measures discussed here, you may wish to experiment with valerian and melatonin, the two best-researched natural sleep aids. (Don't take them together or with sedative drugs, as this may have an additive effect.) Valerian is a sedative herb that has been used for centuries. It's nontoxic and nonaddictive but may leave some people with a fuzzy feeling in the morning. A typical dose is 300 to 600 mg of valerian extract in tablet or capsule form a half hour before bedtime. Melatonin is a hormone that regulates the sleep/wake cycle, and melatonin supplements are available over the counter. I prefer sublingual tablets (to be placed under the tongue and allowed to dissolve); a typical dose is 2.5 mg at bedtime, making sure that the bedroom is completely dark. But a recent analysis of published studies suggests that a much lower dose (0.3 mg) may be just as effective or better (*Sleep Medicine Reviews*, February 2005). Melatonin causes an increase in dreaming in most people, and a few people can't tolerate this supplement because they get nightmares. Don't use either of these remedies every night, so that you don't become psychologically dependent on them.

Explore cognitive-behavioral therapy. Many insomniacs develop anxiety about going to bed and they fear sleeplessness, which can worsen insomnia. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) helps patients to ease these worries and improve their bedtime habits. In a recent study, a few sessions of CBT proved more effective than taking sleeping pills in treating chronic insomnia (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, September 27, 2004). Many sleep clinics now offer this therapy. **SP**

Ask Dr. Weil Herbal Pain Relievers; Too Thin?; and More

What's your advice for skinny folks like myself who'd like to put on some pounds without eating unhealthy foods?

You'll want to consume more calories, but from healthy foods. Make sure that you're eating three meals and at least two or three snacks per day. Add avocado (rich in mono-unsaturated fat) to salads and sandwiches. Snack on a handful of nuts, a wedge of flavorful natural cheese, or an ounce or two of high-quality dark chocolate. Sauté a little garlic in olive oil and use it as a sauce for broccoli, string beans, or other green vegetables. Top bread with seasoned, mashed avocado or nut butter, or dip it in olive oil. Make shakes and smoothies with fruit, 100 percent juice, and yogurt or soy milk. In addition to increasing your calorie intake, I would also recommend strength training two or three times per

week to build muscle. Remember, muscle is more dense than fat. Good luck, but keep in mind that your weight and body shape are influenced by your genes, and these attributes can be difficult to change.

In light of the recent problems with COX-2 inhibiting drugs, should my husband stop taking Zyflamend?

In my opinion, there's no reason for your husband to stop taking this herbal anti-inflammatory. I believe that Zyflamend is safe and won't increase his cardiovascular risk, which is the concern with COX-2 inhibiting drugs, but scientists haven't yet studied this effect. Since this natural product contains 10 different herbs including turmeric and ginger, it doesn't appear to work along a single chemical

Food Can Do's and Can Don'ts

Getting canned is usually a bad thing for employees, but it happens every day to tomatoes, beans, and sardines. In fact, research shows that canned varieties of legumes, fish, fruits, and vegetables are often as nutritious as their fresh and frozen counterparts. Some canned foods pack an even bigger nutritional punch.

Although I prefer the flavor of freshly picked produce, I recognize that not everyone has access to it throughout the year. For many people, canned goods are convenient alternatives. Canned foods also last longer than fresh, putting some of your favorite seasonal fruits and vegetables within reach all year long. Plus, they sometimes cost less. Most unopened cans are good for at least a year and will last a few days in the refrigerator once opened.

Here are my opinions of common types of canned foods and some tips for using them wisely.

Beans. From black beans to garbanzos, most legumes are available in cans and are as rich in fiber, potassium, folic acid, and protein as their dried counterparts. Most canned beans are also low in fat. Many prepared and seasoned canned beans

are healthy; I enjoy Walnut Acres organic baked beans, for example.

Tip: Because salt is often added for flavor, canned beans *can* be high in sodium. Rinsing the beans for a minute cuts only about one-quarter to one-third of the salt. I suggest that you look for lower-sodium or salt-free brands (you may still want to drain and rinse them before using).

Fish. Tuna isn't your only option for canned fish: I enjoy canned sardines, kippers, and salmon, all of which have healthy omega-3 fatty acids and protein at levels comparable to those in fresh varieties. These types of canned fish also contain more calcium than fresh fish, since the canning process softens small, calcium-rich bones, making them edible. In addition, canned salmon is almost all wild in origin, so it contains fewer harmful contaminants than farmed salmon.

Tip: Opt for water-packed fish; if you choose oil-packed, look for brands that use healthier olive or canola oil. Drain canned fish to remove excess salt and oil.

Produce. Fruits and vegetables are typically canned soon after they're picked, which helps seal in nutrients. Some are actually higher in phyto-

chemicals than fresh produce: One study showed that heat processing of sweet corn—which is how canned corn is prepared—boosts antioxidant activity. And research on lycopene has found that this cancer-fighting compound is better absorbed from canned tomatoes and tomato products than from fresh. I sometimes add canned tomatoes to recipes.

Tip: As with beans, some canned vegetables may contain added salt, so look for lower-sodium varieties. When buying canned fruit, choose those packed in their own juice or in water rather than in syrup.

Soup. Depending on their ingredients, canned soups can be good sources of vitamins, lycopene and other carotenoids, and fiber. You can also add more vegetables and beans to amp up the nutritional value.

Tip: Canned soup is notoriously high in salt, with some brands containing upwards of 800 mg of sodium per serving—about one-third of the recommended daily amount. I find “no-salt” varieties too bland, so look for those labeled “reduced-sodium” or season them to your own tastes with herbs instead. Natural foods stores typically have good selections of healthy canned soups. ☞

pathway in the same way as Vioxx or Celebrex, the long-term use of which has been linked to a higher risk of heart attack and stroke. These anti-inflammatory drugs typically contain one synthetic compound that selectively targets and inhibits the COX-2 enzymatic pathway. Their selective action might lead to unexpected complications after long-term use, even though the drug has been found to be safe in short-term clinical trials and approved by the FDA.

In contrast, herbal remedies like Zyflamend contain hundreds of naturally occurring plant compounds at relatively low doses, which work along several different biochemical pathways—not just COX-2—to reduce inflammation. This broad spectrum of action may have a more balanced effect on the body, making it perhaps safer than drugs. According to herbalist Paul Schulick, the CEO of New Chapter, which manufactures Zyflamend, some of the herbal ingredients in this product contain compounds that may actually help protect the heart.

My sister says all women are supposed to have annual Pap tests. But I've had a hysterectomy and my gynecologist says I "don't have anything to test." Who's right?

Your doctor is right, with a few exceptions. A Pap smear typically tests cells from a woman's cervix—the lower end of the uterus—to detect cervical cancer. If you've had your cervix removed as part of a total hysterectomy, the American Cancer Society and other health organizations say that you no longer need Pap smears unless you have a personal history of cervical cancer or precancerous conditions, which may result in cancerous changes or abnormalities elsewhere in the female reproductive system.

Nevertheless, many doctors still perform Pap smears on women who've had hysterectomies because they believe this test may help detect vaginal cancer. Yet, a recent study concluded that testing vaginal cells for cancer—an extremely rare disease—is an unnecessary and expensive practice (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, June 23, 2004). I agree with your gynecologist that you don't need a Pap smear, unless you only had a partial hysterectomy, which leaves the cervix intact. That said, it's important that you still see your doctor for an annual pelvic, rectal, and breast exam to check for other health problems.

Does it really matter if I take antioxidant supplements with a meal?

It generally doesn't matter when you take your antioxidant supplements. However, the exceptions to this advice are vitamin E and mixed carotenoids, which are fat-soluble nutrients and best absorbed by the body when taken with a meal containing some fat. ☞

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing,
42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Two Supplements Ease Depression

Two over-the-counter supplements may each be effective in relieving depression, according to a pair of recent studies. One trial involved about 250 people with moderate to severe depression: Half took the antidepressant drug paroxetine (Paxil), and the others took at least 900 mg daily of St. John's wort. After six weeks, half of those taking the herbal extract were less depressed, compared to only a third of those taking the drug. St. John's wort also produced fewer side effects—mainly stomach upset—than Paxil (*British Medical Journal*, February 11, 2005). A second study of 46 middle-aged and older people with moderate depression found that symptoms eased by at least 50 percent in those taking up to 450 mg daily of the supplemental hormone DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone) for six weeks (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, February 2005). It's not yet clear how DHEA works, but St. John's wort probably increases levels of the mood-boosting brain chemical serotonin.

Comment: Most studies have found St. John's wort to be effective in alleviating mild to moderate depression, but previous research hadn't shown it to help severe depression. I think this new trial is interesting, but I'd like to see more positive studies of the herb before recommending it for severe depression. I think more research is also needed on DHEA, since this hormone can cause side effects like acne and hair loss, and may worsen symptoms in men with benign prostatic hyperplasia. (For more on supplements for depression, see the February 2005 issue.)

Carb Type Influences Obesity

The *type* of carbohydrates and not the amount of them eaten is what's linked to obesity, say Massachusetts researchers. In a study looking at the eating habits of 572 people over one year, people who ate more refined carbohydrates, such as foods made with white flour or sugar and starchy vegetables, were significantly heavier than those who ate lower glycemic index carbohydrates, such as whole grains, fruits, and non-starchy vegetables, which don't cause as rapid a rise in blood sugar levels. The amount of carbs people ate had no influence on body mass index, a measure of obesity. (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, February 15, 2005)

Comment: This study reinforces a nutrition message that I've long emphasized: Pay attention to the kinds of carbohydrate you eat. The best ones have a low glycemic load, meaning they are digested slower and seem better at controlling appetite. Remember, to lose weight you also need to be more physically active and be conscious of your caloric intake. ☞

New Uses for Old Vices

Everybody knows about the bad reputations of caffeine and nicotine. Caffeine can raise blood pressure, increase stress, irritate the gastrointestinal and urinary tracts, and promote insomnia. While nicotine itself hasn't been shown to cause lung cancer or heart disease, this addictive compound puts regular users (and those around them) at risk for these conditions by exposing them to other unhealthy chemicals in tobacco. For these reasons, I always advise against smoking and often recommend eliminating or limiting caffeine as well. Still, recent research suggests that these drugs may not be all bad. Studies have linked them to a number of positive health effects, from improved symptoms of Parkinson's disease to a lower risk of diabetes. While I would certainly never recommend smoking or drinking coffee to *promote* health, I think these findings are intriguing.

Caffeine's Possible Perks

Derived from tea leaves, cola nuts, coffee beans, and other plants, this natural stimulant is the daily drug of choice for the majority of Americans. Once in the bloodstream, caffeine interferes with adenosine, a neurotransmitter that causes drowsiness. By doing so, caffeine promotes wakefulness and—in higher amounts—jitteriness. It also increases levels of the feel-good chemical dopamine. Recent research suggests that caffeine may have positive effects on:

Diabetes. In one study, people who drank at least 10 cups of coffee a day had up to a 79 percent lower risk of diabetes, compared to those drinking two or fewer daily cups (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, March 10, 2004). But it's unclear if caffeine or some other coffee component is responsible for any protective effect. Indeed, other research shows that caffeine can also *raise* blood sugar. If you have diabetes, I recommend discussing caffeine consumption with your dietitian. (Ten cups is an awful lot in my book.)

Exercise. Animal research shows that caffeine may delay fatigue during prolonged physical activity, and a small study found that people who popped a caffeine pill prior to cycling had less leg pain afterwards than those who took a placebo (*Journal of Pain*, August 2003). Caffeine may help by blocking adenosine or other chemicals that cause fatigue and pain.

Parkinson's disease. Research in animals suggests that using caffeine to block adenosine receptors in the brain may help ease symptoms of Parkinson's disease (PD). Meanwhile, human studies have found that men who consume large amounts of caffeine—the equivalent of four or more daily

cups of coffee—have about half the risk of PD as those who consume little or no caffeine.

My bottom line: More research is needed before we can say definitively that caffeine improves health. If you don't already consume caffeine, I don't recommend starting. But I think that people who currently drink coffee might consider switching to tea, which contains some caffeine in addition to antioxidants and other healthy compounds.

Nicotine's Other Side

This compound from the tobacco plant is responsible for cigarettes' addictive properties and helps trigger the release of mood-boosting chemicals like dopamine and serotonin. Studies have linked nicotine to improvement of:

Alzheimer's disease. In lab research, nicotine inhibits the formation of amyloid plaques in the brain that may be partly responsible for Alzheimer's disease (AD). Studies suggest that smokers are less likely to develop AD. And preliminary research found that people with mild to moderate AD who wore nicotine patches (typically used for smoking cessation) for at least four weeks had improvements in memory. Yet, a recent animal study showed chronic nicotine exposure *increases* tangles of nerve fibers, another marker for AD (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, February 22, 2005). And nicotine can also impair memory, possibly by decreasing blood flow to the brain. It's too soon to say whether nicotine lowers—or perhaps raises—AD risk.

Parkinson's disease. Smokers tend to have lower rates of PD, leading to speculation that nicotine might help prevent this disease. Small, preliminary studies have found that some PD patients who wear nicotine patches have an improvement in their symptoms, possibly because nicotine boosts levels of dopamine, which tend to be low in people with PD.

Tourette's syndrome. One study of 70 children with Tourette's syndrome—a condition marked by vocal tics and involuntary movements—found that those who wore daily nicotine patches for a month had fewer symptoms and needed less medication (*Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, September 2001). It's not yet certain how nicotine helps ease Tourette's.

My bottom line: No one advises smoking as a way to gain potential benefits from nicotine. As for nicotine patches, they don't appear to be addictive, because they generally contain less nicotine and deliver it to the bloodstream more slowly than cigarette smoking does. Still, such patches can have side effects like nausea, muscle cramps, and increased heart rate. Researchers at drug companies and tobacco manufacturers are now working to create nicotine analogues—related compounds that would have the benefits of nicotine without its bad effects—to treat the conditions above. Stay tuned. **SP**

next issue

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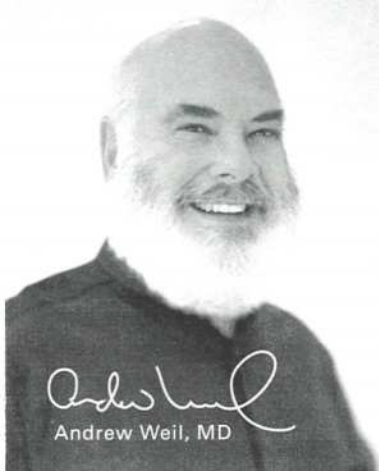
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ON MY MIND:

SuperSlow

I recently tried SuperSlow, a form of strength training that uses very slow motion with weights to build muscle.

What it is: In SuperSlow, it takes about 10 seconds to lift a weight and 5 seconds to lower it (traditional strength training takes about 7 seconds total per exercise). Besides doing the exercise more slowly, you do fewer repetitions—say, four to eight instead of 15. Studies are mixed, but some research suggests SuperSlow is more effective at improving strength than regular weight lifting. Proponents say it can even eliminate the need for aerobic exercise.

My take: I found SuperSlow to be both intense and enjoyable, and it helped me focus more on my technique and control. Yet, there's no good evidence that SuperSlow can replace aerobic activity, and for some people, it may seem too difficult or tedious. For more, visit superslow.com. **SP**

Stocking a Spring Medicine Chest

Spring is a time of renewal, from seeing the first leaf-buds on trees to doing a thorough house-cleaning. When spring cleaning, don't neglect your medicine cabinet: It's a good time to reassess the natural remedies you keep on hand and remove those past their expiration dates. Here is a list of several of my favorite herbs and supplements for hay fever, bee stings, and other problems that are more common during springtime.

Supplements for Springtime

You can find the following remedies at natural food stores or online, and fresh garlic is readily available at your local supermarket. Because the bathroom tends to be too warm and moist for most supplements, I recommend storing yours in a cool, dry, dark place like a locked cabinet or closet.

Apis. With spring flowers now in bloom, the air is abuzz with bees. If you're stung, try *Apis mellifica*, a homeopathic remedy derived from honeybees and their venom. Based on the homeopathic principle that "like cures like," it's believed that using highly dilute amounts of these substances will help ease the swelling, pain, and other symptoms of a bee sting. Look for tablets or pellets of *Apis*, and follow package directions.

Arnica. Spring's warm weather should encourage you to get outside and enjoy the season, whether you're gardening, cycling, or simply walking more. But increased physical activity may also boost your chances of injury. For bruises and minor sprains, I massage tincture of arnica (*Arnica sp.*) into unbroken skin every three or four hours to reduce pain and swelling and promote healing. You can also use arnica gels, creams, and oral homeopathic tablets for this purpose.

Butterbur. This herb does double duty as a remedy for seasonal allergies and migraine headaches (spring's weather changes can be a migraine trigger for some people). Research

suggests that butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) may work as well as taking conventional antihistamines for allergies, but without causing drowsiness. And in a recent study, people taking 75 mg of the herb twice a day had nearly 50 percent fewer migraines (*Neurology*, December 28, 2004). If you suffer from hay fever or migraine headaches, keep some butterbur on hand. One reliable product is Petadolex; follow package directions.

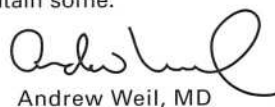
Garlic. Come May, you'll find me in my garden, harvesting the garlic plants I grow there. I prefer fresh garlic to supplements, which may not have the same health benefits as the whole herb. I think this spring bulb (*Allium sativum*), which has potent antibacterial, antiviral, and immune-boosting properties, is a useful remedy to stock up on. Choose firm, plump heads of garlic, and eat a few raw or lightly cooked cloves when you have a yeast, viral, or bacterial infection or when you feel a cold coming on.

Quercetin. I've found that a good preventive supplement for hay fever is the bioflavonoid (plant pigment) quercetin. Although more studies are needed, this natural compound appears to help reduce the body's inflammatory response to pollen and other allergens. Quercetin is found in foods and beverages like apples, onions, red and purple grapes, red wine, and green and black tea, but I think your best bet is to take it in supplement form: Take 500 mg of quercetin twice a day between meals, starting about a month before allergy season and continuing throughout it. By the way, it's fine to take both quercetin and a symptomatic treatment such as butterbur or stinging nettle (see below) together during allergy season.

Stinging nettle. If you develop allergy symptoms, I've had most success treating them with stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*). This herb appears to act as an anti-inflammatory and antihistamine. In my experience, capsules of the freeze-dried herb are best; follow package directions. **SP**

After listening to recent findings presented by Walter Willett, MD, of the Harvard School of Public Health at the Program in Integrative Medicine's Nutrition and Health conference in early March, I became convinced that people aren't getting enough vitamin D, whether from their diet, by exposure to sunlight, or through daily supplementation. Deficiencies of this fat-soluble vitamin have been associated with a wide range of health concerns, from the re-emergence of rickets in breast-fed babies to slower growth and weakened bones in children to fractures in older women. What's more, low blood levels of the vitamin have been linked to a higher risk of prostate and colon cancer, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and high blood pressure.

Older people, because their needs are higher and they get less sunlight, and African Americans, because dark skin interferes with sunlight's absorption and production of vitamin D, seem to be at higher risk of deficiency. Those who live in northern climates and spend winters mainly indoors are also at higher risk. The current recommended dietary intake of the vitamin ranges from 200 to 600 IU per day, while I have suggested levels between 400 and 800 IU a day, with older people aiming for the higher amounts. But Dr. Willett's research has persuaded me to *change* my recommendation and encourage all Americans to take at least 1,000 IU daily from vitamin D supplements. That's an amount not currently found in multivitamins, but some brands now make vitamin D supplements with 1,000 IU. It's extremely difficult to get this much every day from diet alone: The vitamin is found naturally in very few foods except fish, but fortified products such as milk, eggs, orange juice, and breakfast cereals contain some.



Andrew Weil, MD

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Dr. Andrew Weil's

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A French Gastronomy Lesson

The French are known for their fine wines, stylish fashions, and their sensual kisses. But these days, readers seem eager to find out why *French women don't get fat*. In a best-selling book bearing that title (Knopf, 2005), author Mireille Guiliano explains how the French and American outlooks on eating, drinking, and exercising differ. I believe the French have the right attitude: They enjoy their food more than Americans, and they emphasize quality, not quantity. They eat a wider variety of food made from better ingredients. Their portions are smaller, and they don't skip meals. They take time in preparing food, and they don't have guilt about deriving pleasure from their dining experience.

It's been suggested that one reason why French women are thinner than Americans is that more of them smoke. But the percentage of female smokers is similar in the two countries. What then are the secrets to staying slender in a nation of food lovers who indulge in its cheeses, breads, pastries, chocolates, wines, and multi-course meals? Guiliano fills us in:

Choose quality over quantity. French people eat fresher, less-processed food with

an eye to what's in season, for maximum flavor and value. They seek out the best local markets and may pay more for quality ingredients. Fruits and vegetables are regularly enjoyed at meals.

Savor what you eat. Use all your senses to appreciate food's texture, flavor, aroma, and visual presentation. Eating should be about pleasure, not guilt and deprivation. Make mealtime special by sitting down, paying attention to food's taste, and not eating until you feel stuffed (for instance, you might feel satisfied with just three bites of a dish or dessert).

Play with seasonings. Experiment with a range of fresh herbs and spices, and ingredients such as mushrooms, leeks, peppercorns, and mustards. A few familiar dishes can seem new by seasoning them differently. Train your palate to notice these flavors and your mind might be content sooner—with less, but tastier, food.

Drink more water. Unlike Americans, who tend to sip water here and there, French women drink it by the glassful all day long. As for wine, enjoy it with meals instead of liquor. *Bon appétit.* ☞

Asthma: Exploring the Mind-Body Connection

When I was a medical student in the 1960s, asthma was thought to be a psychosomatic illness involving emotional factors. In fact, asthma used to be called “asthma nervosa,” and in the mid-twentieth century, some physicians advocated “parentectomy”—sending children with severe asthma to boarding schools to avoid any psychological conflicts with their parents. However, the role of emotions in asthma was largely discounted in the 1970s, when airway inflammation was found to cause the disease.

But in the past several years, evidence has been mounting that emotional stress can indeed trigger or worsen asthma attacks, although not cause the disease itself. For instance, a recent trial found that asthmatic children were four times more likely to have an asthma attack within a day or two of a stressful life event such as moving or an upheaval in family relationships (*Thorax*, December 2004). Other research suggests that both acute and chronic stress can affect immune response in ways that promote inflammation in the body.

I believe everyone with asthma can benefit from learning relaxation techniques. These methods not only ease the stress that can trigger asthma, but can also help counter the vicious cycle of panic and respiratory difficulty that builds up during an attack. The mind-body measures I’ve recommended most often to asthma patients are breath work, hypnotherapy, and guided imagery, but others have also proved helpful in studies. Find an approach that appeals to you and practice it regularly. Still, don’t use these methods *in place of* medication, especially if your symptoms are moderate or severe, and don’t change your drug dosage without your doctor’s supervision.

Breathing exercises. I know many people with asthma who have found breath work invaluable. Studies show that breathing exercises can improve lung function, reduce symptoms and medication use, and improve quality of life in asthma patients. You can learn about breathing techniques from my books or my recording *Breathing: The Master Key to Self Healing* (to order, call 888-337-9345). Also, the Buteyko method claims to treat asthma by retraining breathing patterns to correct hyperventilation. There’s some evidence that Buteyko breathing exercises can be useful, and I think it’s fine to experiment with them. For more, visit buteyko-usa.com.

Guided imagery. Using your imagination may help you breathe easier, whether you picture a favorite place or imagine breathing through open, relaxed airways. In a recent pilot study, 47 percent of asthmatic adults who practiced imagery exercises daily for about four months were able to reduce or even discontinue their medication, while only 19 percent of those in the control group were able to do so (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, July–August 2004). See box for an exercise used in the study. A good resource is Belleruth Naparstek’s guided imagery recording *A Meditation to Help Relieve Asthma* (to order, call 800-800-8661). To find a guided imagery practitioner, visit academyforguidedimagery.com.

Hypnotherapy. Research suggests that this mind-body technique can improve lung function in adults, particularly those who are easily hypnotized. Studies by Ran Anbar, MD,

Imagery for Easier Breathing

This imagery exercise from New York psychiatrist Gerald Epstein, MD, called “Taking a Weight Off Your Chest,” can be practiced daily or whenever someone with asthma notices constriction or tightness in the chest.

Close your eyes and breathe out three times slowly. See and sense a weight on and in your chest. Feel and sense the constriction it gives you. Breathe out one time slowly and remove this weight. See and sense your lungs expanding and filling with white light as you find your breathing becoming easy and flowing. Then, open your eyes.

a pediatric pulmonologist at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, New York, indicate that hypnotherapy can ease symptoms in children with asthma or other breathing problems. Check out *Asthma and Breathing*, a self-hypnosis CD by Steve Gurgevich, PhD (to order, call 866-506-1700). To locate a hypnotherapist, visit asch.net.

Biofeedback. This approach uses electronic monitoring devices to teach people how to consciously control body functions, and small studies suggest that a type of biofeedback training that increases heart rate variability (HRV) can improve lung function. In a recent trial, adults with asthma who received training in HRV biofeedback reduced their use of inhaled steroids and also showed improvements in asthma severity (*Chest*, August 2004). To find a biofeedback practitioner, visit bcia.org.

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR). Practicing PMR, which involves tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in the body, may allow some children with asthma to taper their dose of inhaled steroids, according to a study (not yet published) by my colleague John Mark, MD, at the University of Arizona’s Pediatric Pulmonary and Integrative Medicine Program. Some earlier research found this method can improve lung function in people with asthma. For more on PMR, see our September 2001 issue.

Journaling. Expressing your emotions in writing may ease asthma, although research is mixed. In a 1999 study, asthma patients who wrote about a traumatic incident had better lung function months later. But in a more recent study, writing about emotions had little effect on asthma (*Psychosomatic Medicine*, January/February 2005). If you’d like to try journaling, you might write about your feelings—positive or negative—for 15 or 20 minutes a day.

Yoga, tai chi, and qigong. These Eastern forms of exercise, all of which feature deep breathing techniques, can be very relaxing. Studies show that practicing yoga on a regular basis can reduce asthma symptoms and medication usage. In China, qigong is often prescribed for treating asthma, and German research suggests that daily practice of this method can improve lung function and reduce asthma severity. 

Life After Breast Cancer: When Treatment Ends

The breast cancer journey is hardly over when your final chemotherapy or radiation treatment is completed. Some women might tell you that the real challenges are just beginning and come from living with the disease. In all likelihood, a woman with breast cancer is so consumed with the shock of her diagnosis, the numerous medical decisions, and getting through each stage of treatment that she lacks the time or energy to sort through the emotional impact of the disease or its implications on the rest of her life. And so there is a period of readjustment and transition, which can last weeks, months, or occasionally years, to cope with the physical discomforts of treatment as well as any psychological issues that might arise.

This post-treatment time can be a vulnerable and difficult one for breast cancer survivors. (Interestingly, the National Cancer Institute defines a survivor as a person who has been *diagnosed* with cancer and the friends, family members, and caregivers affected by it.) Survivors might feel scared or anxious that the safety net of treatment is gone. Some women are surprised to find themselves feeling exhausted, sad, angry, or out of sorts. Such feelings are normal, but they need to be addressed. Although active treatment has ended, the physical healing and emotional recovery have not, and they take time. While friends, family, and coworkers might hope life can “get back to normal,” breast cancer survivors soon realize that “normal” has changed and life is different for them.

Breast Cancer Husband

When his wife was first diagnosed with breast cancer, journalist Marc Silver wanted to say and do the right things. He wished that there was a practical guide written from a male's point of view, explaining what he needed to know and how to help his wife navigate the disease. Eventually he wrote such a book, *Breast Cancer Husband* (Rodale, 2004), after interviewing nearly 100 couples who had been through similar circumstances. His advice for the post-treatment period:

1 Be quiet and listen. The most important task for a breast cancer husband is to be there for his wife and listen to what she's saying. Don't try to be Mr. Fix-it when it comes to cancer or solving her problems.

2 Adjust to a “new normal.” This is a new phase of your life. A cancer diagnosis might be reason for both of you to change for the better: to eat healthier, exercise regularly, and enjoy life more.

3 Don't rush things. Your wife has to live with the reminders of breast cancer on a regular basis, whether it's looking in the mirror or remaining vigilant about her health and the possibility that cancer might recur. Be sensitive to these fears and have patience since her moods might go up and down.

I think there's much that can be done to heal the whole person in body, mind, and spirit. So along with three integrative oncology specialists—family practitioner Judith Boyce, MD, and radiation oncologist Matt Mumber, MD, of the Floyd Center for Health and Healing in Rome, Georgia, both graduates of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine's associate fellowship, and mental health counselor Marcey DiCaro, who directs outreach services at the Sunstone Cancer Support Centers in Tucson—I'll discuss some physical and emotional concerns during recovery.

Handling the Physical Aftermath

After treatment, a woman might be adjusting to both her new body and her new look. If she had chemotherapy, her hair is slowly growing back and she may have menopausal symptoms. She could be adapting to life without one or both breasts, scars left by surgery, or skin that's sensitive from radiation. In a study of more than 800 breast cancer survivors, the most common symptoms were muscle aches and stiffness, joint pain, dissatisfaction with body image, forgetfulness, and hot flashes (*Journal of Clinical Oncology*, February 1998). Here are ways to manage some of these concerns.

Lymphedema. This painful swelling in the arm or hand occurs in roughly 5 to 30 percent of women who have had lymph nodes removed during breast surgery. It can happen days or years after the operation when lymphatic fluid can't drain properly because of fewer pathways. Instead, it pools in the surrounding tissue, where it could lead to infection.

Advice: Many women manage lymphedema well by doing stretching exercises prescribed by a physical therapist and wearing a fitted elasticized sleeve on their swollen arm. I also recommend manual lymph drainage, an effective massage technique that uses light strokes to reduce fluid accumulation. To find a lymphedema therapist, contact the National Lymphedema Network at lymphnet.org or (800) 541-3259.

Memory changes. “Chemobrain” describes the mental fog and forgetfulness that can follow chemotherapy. Whether you're having trouble concentrating, multitasking, or remembering things, it's not clear whether such cognitive changes are due to treatment itself, fatigue, stress, hormonal shifts, getting older, depression, or having cancer. Chances are, more than one factor is responsible.

Advice: To compensate, practice relaxation methods, exercise your body and mind, and get enough rest. Writing lists and notes to yourself can also keep you on track. Chemobrain typically goes away within a year or two after treatment ends.

Fatigue. The cumulative toll of treatment leaves many patients feeling wiped out and exhausted. Plus, some medications taken afterward can also tire you out, and such lingering side effects as joint pain and hot flashes can affect sleep.

Advice: Time is on your side: The farther removed you are from treatment, the more likely that your energy will return to its usual levels. Many experts say that it can take the same amount of time to regain your usual sense of well-being as the

total length of your treatment. Being physically active is an important aspect of recovery; work up to at least 30 minutes of daily moderate activity, such as brisk walking or cycling, five times a week. Eating nourishing foods can also help restore stamina. And have realistic expectations; women should ease back gradually into their caregiving roles and usual responsibilities and take the time needed to rest and heal.

Weight gain and diet. Studies suggest that women have a tendency to gain weight after a breast cancer diagnosis, even those who had chemotherapy. Researchers think this may be due to some of the drugs used in treatment, being less active, eating frequent meals to ease nausea, and undergoing a chemically induced menopause that could slow metabolism. Many women wonder if their earlier eating habits contributed to their getting cancer and are newly motivated to make the best food choices to support recovery and prevent recurrence.

Advice: To manage your weight, the best advice remains to eat less and exercise more. It's important to maintain a healthy weight because the risk of breast cancer recurrence is almost triple in women who are overweight. View food as a way to nurture your body and strengthen your immune system. For women who have had breast cancer, follow a high-fiber, low-fat diet, with minimal amounts of processed foods and refined sugar. Eat at least nine daily servings of fruits and vegetables, preferably organic and particularly cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, kale, and cauliflower, which are rich sources of antioxidants and cancer-protective compounds. Avoid trans fats and fried foods, reduce saturated fats, and choose a monounsaturated cooking oil, not a polyunsaturated one. Replace some animal protein with more fish and plant-based sources (use only hormone-free, organically produced meat, poultry, and dairy products). I think it's fine to include a daily serving or two of soy foods, but avoid soy supplements and soy protein shakes, which have high levels of plant estrogens. Limit alcohol to an occasional drink or abstain altogether. Drink plenty of water and more green tea, which contains powerful antioxidants that might slow cancer growth, and spice up meals with fresh garlic or turmeric, both of which have beneficial anticancer compounds.

Healing Emotionally After Treatment

Treatment itself may have been so overwhelming that many breast cancer survivors only realize its emotional effects once it ends. Indeed, studies suggest survivors are worried about cancer recurrence, feel uncertain about what to expect after treatment is over, and might have low moods. This is a time when some feel as if they're falling apart and reach out for help. Researchers are just beginning to explore quality of life issues in breast cancer survivors, as their ranks steadily grow. Ideas for coping with the psychological impact appear below.

Fear of recurrence. Once you have had cancer, you might fear its return, spread, or your own mortality. There could be shame or guilt that something you did led to your cancer diagnosis or that you'll pass this legacy on to your children. Every ache, cold, or headache may make you question whether the cancer is acting up. Such fears are to be expected.

Advice: By working with a psychotherapist or in a cancer support group, survivors can be reassured that their fears are

Resources for Recovery

Educating yourself with good information can offer peace of mind. Two comprehensive books about the recovery period are *After Breast Cancer* by Hester Hill Schnipper (Bantam, 2003) and *Living Beyond Breast Cancer* by Marisa C. Weiss, MD, and Ellen Weiss (Three Rivers Press, 1998). Some valuable websites for information on living well beyond breast cancer are lbcc.org and breastcancer.org, and for exercise advice, see stayingabreast.com. For more on cancer retreat centers that emphasize the healing arts, visit commonweal.org and sunstonehealing.net as well as manystreamsheal.org, a Georgia-based retreat center run by Dr. Matt Mumber. To learn how to cope with menopause symptoms naturally, see our September 2001 issue.

completely normal and that it's healthy to express them honestly and openly. A support group or cancer retreat center can offer a safe place to share your feelings in a caring environment that encourages healing. What's more, having some coping tools to address these anxieties—rather than escape them—gives an individual the confidence to live life to the fullest and feel less frightened. Instead of worrying, learning skills such as breath work, meditation, journaling, sensible eating, or yoga can channel a survivor's energies into positive actions that might help reduce cancer risk.

Self-image and sexuality. For some women, femininity is closely tied to physical appearance and when cancer treatments alter their looks, they might feel self-conscious, less attractive to their partners, and also less interested in sex. Although some relationships are tested by the stresses and strains of breast cancer, other couples describe feeling even closer having braved the illness together.

Advice: If you have lost a breast or its appearance has changed, this is a genuine loss. Acknowledge these feelings, and give yourself time to grieve and feel comfortable with the changes in your body. You might need to reconsider your definition of beauty, to include not only the physical but also the inner self—your mental and spiritual qualities. Couples can explore new ways to be affectionate and intimate toward each other through touch and honest communication. And a partner can do much to reassure a woman that she remains beautiful, desirable, and lovable.

Depression and anxiety. Experts say that depression and anxiety are not uncommon after breast cancer surgery. There could be feelings of anger about the cancer, and many experts feel that depression is anger turned inward.

Advice: Research suggests that the sooner breast cancer survivors start exercising following surgery, the greater the benefit to their mental health. Studies have also found that women who did light to moderate exercise felt physically stronger and more in control of their lives, as well as less depressed and anxious. An oncology social worker or psychotherapist can help a cancer survivor to work through depression, anger, or anxiety and avoid staying stuck in these powerful emotions. 

Ask Dr. Weil Hypoglycemia; Airborne for Colds; and More

I've heard the peel of citrus fruits has health benefits. Is this true? Is there a way to incorporate it into my diet?

The colored part or zest of lemon, orange, and other citrus peels contains d-limonene, a phytochemical with cancer-protective effects. In a 2001 study here at the University of Arizona, drinking hot black tea with citrus peel reduced the risk of squamous cell skin cancer by 70 percent (hot black tea alone cut risk by only 40 percent). The white part or pith of citrus peel contains flavonoids, other healthful compounds. Animal research suggests that flavonoids found in orange and tangerine peels can lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol, and researchers are testing whether these same compounds in supplement form can lower cholesterol in humans.

Although the white pith is bitter and best avoided, lemon or orange zest can add intense flavor to recipes. Zest can be peeled with a zester or a sharp paring knife, then added (as is

or minced) to soups or salads or sprinkled over fish or chicken before cooking. I think the oils in citrus zest could be irritating to the stomach, so use it only in moderation. To avoid exposure to pesticides, use only peel from organic fruits.

What do you think of the supplement Airborne, which is supposed to prevent and treat colds?

This supplement, which comes in effervescent tablets that dissolve in water and is sold over the counter at drugstores, has become quite popular since Oprah Winfrey praised it on her talk show in September 2004. Created by a schoolteacher who was tired of getting colds from her students or when traveling, Airborne includes several vitamins, minerals, and herbs that purportedly fight colds, including vitamin C, zinc, echinacea, ginger, and other herbs used in Chinese medicine. Package directions say to take it before

Do Cell Phones Pose Health Risks?

A *New Yorker* cartoon from a few years ago shows a man who has apparently just emerged from a car accident. In one hand he holds a detached steering wheel, in the other a cell phone into which he says, "I was distracted for a moment. Go on." It's no surprise that using a hand-held cell phone while driving increases your chance of an accident, and studies show that even hands-free phones can distract drivers and slow reaction times. But could cell phones also increase the risk of cancer, Alzheimer's disease, or other conditions? I'll share my thoughts on this controversial topic.

The evidence. Cell phone antennas emit electromagnetic waves, a form of radiation. But whether or not exposure to this low-level radiation leads to health problems is still unclear. Some studies have found no link between cell phones and ill health, but other findings are more troubling. For instance:

► In December 2004, a study involving research groups in seven European countries released results showing increases in DNA damage in human and animal cells exposed

to cell phone radiation in the laboratory. Such DNA damage could foster the development of cancer.

► Researchers in Sweden found that people who regularly used cell phones (mostly analog-style phones) for 10 or more years were at greater risk of acoustic neuroma, a non-cancerous tumor on the auditory nerve linking the brain and the inner ear. The highest risk was on the side of the head where the phone was usually held (*Epidemiology*, November 2004). It's unclear if newer digital cell phones pose similar long-term risks.

► Another Swedish study showed that cell phone radiation can damage brain cells in rats, raising concerns that the phones may contribute to neurological conditions in humans such as Alzheimer's disease (*Environmental Health Perspectives*, June 2003).

► Other studies have linked cell phones to headaches and sleep problems in some users.

My opinion. While I don't believe these findings are cause for panic, I think the subject of cell phone safety deserves more attention than it's gotten in this country. There is far more research being done in Europe, says

my friend Louis Slesin, PhD, editor of *Microwave News* (microwavenews.com), an online publication that covers health issues related to electromagnetic radiation. In Britain, the chairman of the National Radiological Protection Board recommended in January that cell phones should not be used by children under 8, because a child's developing brain may be at higher risk for radiation damage.

While research continues, I suggest taking reasonable precautions to reduce your exposure to cell phone radiation. Use traditional land-line phones when possible. When using a cell phone, keep conversations short and to a minimum. If your phone has a retractable antenna, pull it out when the phone is in use; cell phones emit more radiation when working to overcome a weaker signal. For the same reason, limit calls inside buildings, and use the phone in open spaces when possible. Consider getting a hands-free kit, which is what I use; these devices can greatly reduce radiation exposure, and I find them more convenient. Finally, if you must make a call while behind the wheel, pull off the road first. ☞

entering crowded environments or at the first sign of cold symptoms, repeating every three hours as needed.

While there's been no published research on this supplement, I think the herbal ingredients (although not necessarily the vitamins and minerals) might be helpful against colds. You may want to limit yourself to three doses a day so that you're not getting excessive amounts of vitamins and minerals, especially if you also take a multivitamin/multimineral. When I'm coming down with a cold, I'll take echinacea or andrographis, a cold-fighting herb popular in Scandinavia. Some studies suggest these herbs can reduce the duration or severity of colds. In addition, I've found that eating fresh garlic is a good cold remedy. And the best way to prevent a cold is to wash your hands frequently.

Our 10-month-old son has an undescended testicle. Is there a more natural solution than surgery?

According to my colleague Sandy Newmark, MD, a pediatrician in Tucson, surgery is the best option for this problem, in which a testicle fails to descend from the abdominal cavity into the scrotum before birth. The cause isn't known, but undescended testicles are more common in baby boys who are premature or have a low birth weight. The testicle will often drop naturally before a boy is nine months old. Left untreated, however, an undescended testicle can raise your son's risk of infertility and testicular cancer later in life.

If the problem doesn't correct itself before a boy is about a year old, I recommend orchiopexy. This type of surgery moves the testicle into the scrotum, increasing your son's future odds of fertility and allowing for easier detection of testicular cancer. Orchiopexy is performed under general anesthesia, and your son can likely go home the same day.

My granddaughter has been diagnosed with hypoglycemia. What do you recommend to treat this condition?

Hypoglycemia, or abnormally low blood sugar, is most common in people with diabetes, since insulin and other diabetes drugs can cause blood sugar levels to fluctuate. An episode typically causes symptoms like dizziness, headaches, anxiety, and shakiness, and is resolved by eating or drinking something sweet and by possibly adjusting the diabetes drug for the long term. In extreme cases, diabetes-related hypoglycemia can cause loss of consciousness or coma if untreated. You don't say whether your granddaughter has diabetes, but true hypoglycemia is quite rare in people who don't have diabetes, severe liver disease, or a tumor, or who have not used excessive amounts of alcohol, aspirin, or other drugs. Hypoglycemia was a fad diagnosis among alternative practitioners some years ago, and since its symptoms are similar to those of many other problems, including panic attacks and stress, I'd make sure your granddaughter gets an accurate diagnosis.

To keep blood sugar stable in people with or without diabetes, I recommend eating five or six small, balanced meals

How Hypnosis Eases Pain

A large body of research has linked hypnosis to pain relief, and now a recent study suggests how this mind-body approach works to reduce pain. Researchers in Germany and at the University of Iowa placed a heating device on the skin of 12 healthy people to determine the temperature that each person considered painful. When the painful heat was applied again, the volunteers' brain activity was scanned using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). The scientists performed two fMRI scans—one when the people were hypnotized prior to being touched with the heat, and one when not hypnotized. They found that hypnosis was successful in significantly reducing or eliminating pain in all 12 volunteers. Perhaps more impressive, the fMRI scans showed that, under hypnosis, activity was reduced in the areas of the brain responsible for pain perception. (Brain activity was not reduced when the volunteers weren't hypnotized.) According to the researchers, these brain changes suggest that hypnosis somehow blocks pain signals in the body from getting to the parts of the brain that perceive pain. (*Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine*, November–December 2004)

Comment: I think this small, but important, study gives hypnosis more scientific credibility, because it demonstrates the reality of otherwise subjective experiences (like feeling less pain) in terms that neuroscientists can accept. Similar studies have used imaging to show how meditation influences brain chemistry to improve memory, learning, and mood. 

and snacks throughout the day. Limit high-glycemic-index foods such as those made with refined sugar and flour, and avoid caffeine and alcohol, which can worsen symptoms. Your granddaughter might also try supplementing with GTF (glucose tolerance factor) chromium, which has been shown in some studies to help stabilize blood sugar. Take 200 mcg a day, and give it a two-month trial to see if it helps.

My daughter, who has arthritis, is pregnant and can't take her usual pain medication. Is acupuncture safe for her?

I think that acupuncture is safe during pregnancy. In fact, studies have found this ancient technique to be effective in easing back pain, morning sickness, and other complaints in expectant mothers. While there's a theoretical concern that acupuncture could trigger labor, the points and needling techniques believed to stimulate the uterus are typically forbidden during treatment. I think acupuncture is much safer than pain medications during pregnancy and don't foresee a problem as long as your daughter sees a licensed acupuncturist who has experience treating pregnant women. 

Three New Food Trends

Trends in food and nutrition are nothing new. Like Pet Rocks, some food fads are pointless and their popularity plummets quickly—think of the restrictive and unpalatable cabbage soup or grapefruit diet, which only resulted in temporary weight loss. Others fall out of favor when new scientific studies dispute their value: Until the mid-1960s, a high-fat, low-fiber diet was actually recommended to prevent disease. And still other trends, like the Atkins diet and other low-carbohydrate eating plans, may peak, fade, and return for yet another comeback years later. Despite this country's skyrocketing obesity rates and love affair with Big Macs, there are some encouraging signs of healthier eating patterns. Here, I'll discuss three trends—showcasing less meat, better fast food, and slower, more mindful dining—that I think are worth raising a fork to.

Moving away from meat. I've long advocated following a plant-based diet that's light on animal foods, especially meat, so I'm pleased that one current trend signals progress in this direction. Several decades ago, vegetarians (who eat no meat, poultry, or fish) were relatively scarce, and vegans (who eschew all animal products, including dairy) were even scarcer. These days, the line between meat-eaters and vegetarians has blurred, with an estimated 40 percent of Americans now considered "flexitarians." This new term, which was voted the most useful word of 2003 by the American Dialect Society, refers to people who want more flexibility—they prefer a vegetarian diet, but they also occasionally eat meat, poultry, fish, or all three.

I think flexitarianism indicates less of a move away from strict vegetarianism and more of a shift toward eating less meat in general. And many dedicated vegetarians and vegans don't seem to mind: They believe that many flexitarians will eventually go completely meat-free. The move toward less meat may be due in part to the increasing availability of foods such as soy products and veggie burgers: They're now sold at most supermarkets and even appear on restaurant menus. For people who want to eat a healthier diet but aren't committed vegetarians, such options can comfortably share shelf space with foods such as chicken breasts, salmon fillets, and low-fat dairy products.

I could use the term "flexitarian" to describe my plant-based diet, since it also includes some dairy, fish, and the occasional egg. But whatever you call it, I support the concept of flexitarianism and hope that this trend continues. For tips on incorporating more plant-based foods into your daily diet, see the August 2000 issue.

Fast food gets healthier. In March, McDonald's unveiled a marketing campaign promoting physical activity to reduce obesity. Exercise is definitely important, but I think the fast-food giant would do better to improve the quality of its meals first. It's true that McDonald's and other chains have made some attempts at providing healthier fare like salads, yogurt, and fruit, probably in response to charges that their food contributes to poor health. But by and large, fast-food menus are still loaded with salt, fat, and calories.

In my book *Eating Well for Optimum Health*, I stressed the need for restaurants that would offer tasty, quick, and healthful meals. There's still a long way to go before healthy fast-food chains become ubiquitous and inexpensive enough to realistically compete with McDonald's and Burger King. Most chains are still small and limited to just a few locations. But the past several years have seen a definite rise in such establishments, and their popularity seems proof of the public's desire for better choices.

Fast, healthy fare can range from soy burgers and fruit smoothies (Florida's EVOS; evos.com) to Asian noodles and wraps (the Northeast's Fresh City; freshcity.com) to burritos made with organic, free-range meat (Chipotle; chipotle.com). I also enjoy slightly more upscale "fast-casual" chains like New England's O'Naturals (onaturals.com) and California's Native Foods (nativefoods.com), which offer organic, vegetarian, and even vegan choices. If you live near or are visiting any of these locations, give one of these restaurants a try.

"Slow Food" gathers momentum. The antithesis of McDonald's may be Slow Food, an international movement that aims to restore pleasure, quality, and cultural diversity to the dining experience. Unlike fast food, Slow Food involves preparing fresh, unprocessed meals, eating them slowly, and supporting locally grown, organic food. Started in Italy in the 1980s as a response to the growth of fast food, Slow Food has about 800 chapters worldwide, with 140 of them in the United States. I'm a fan of Slow Food, which has continued to increase in popularity: You can now find Slow Food cookbooks and restaurant guides for sale, and the movement's influence can be seen in some of the offerings at natural food stores such as Whole Foods.

Of course, in today's fast-paced world, it may be difficult for many people to fully embrace all aspects of the Slow Food lifestyle—like making pasta noodles from scratch, for example. But it's worth adopting some elements: Buy organic produce at your local farmers' market, try an unusual type of artisan cheese, start an herb garden in your kitchen, or ask a relative to show you how to prepare a favorite family recipe. I think that by devoting a little extra time to dining, you'll enjoy your food more, and you'll likely eat healthier fare. (To learn more about Slow Food, visit slowfood.com.) 

next issue

Sun and Your Skin

Multiple Sclerosis

Battling Belly Fat

Health Risk, or Not?

contact

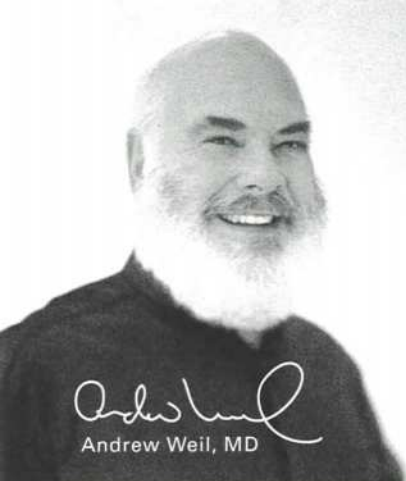
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JUNE 2005

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

A Few Skin Cancer Surprises

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ON MY MIND:

Eat Locally

Most produce travels over a thousand miles from harvest to supermarket, losing nutrients and flavor along the way. A tastier option if you can't pick them directly from a garden is to seek out locally grown fruits and vegetables in season. Here are two possibilities:

Farmers' markets. I've found that the produce from farmers' markets is typically fresher than store-bought and less likely to be sprayed with post-harvest pesticides. You may also find better varieties, like heirloom tomatoes. To find farmers' markets, visit www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets.

CSA programs. In community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, you pay a local grower for a share of the season's harvest. In return, you receive fresh, typically organic produce each week during the growing season. To find CSA programs, visit localharvest.org/csa. 

Sunshine on your shoulders might make you happy, as the song goes, but it can also increase your risk of skin cancer. In fact, all three major types of skin cancer are on the rise: It's estimated that up to half of all American adults will have basal cell carcinoma (BCC) or squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) at least once, while rates of melanoma—a less common but far more dangerous form—have more than doubled in the last several decades. The reasons for these increases aren't clear, although exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays is still a major cause. As I'll explain below, other factors—from your gender to your diet—may play a role as well. Here are some facts about skin cancer that you might not know.

Men are at higher risk. Although skin cancer affects men and women of all ages and races, white men over 50 are most likely to develop all forms of the disease. Experts believe that environment is mostly responsible: Men tend to spend more time outdoors, whether for work (such as construction) or hobbies (like golf). Plus, women apply sunscreen and check their skin for trouble spots more frequently, and wear makeup or moisturizers that offer some sun protection. Men should take special care to follow the prevention advice at the end of this article.

Diet makes a difference. Just as putting sunscreen on your body's outer surface can help prevent skin cancer, what you put *inside* matters, too. Studies have found that a high-fat diet increases the risk of skin cancer in animals, while a low-fat diet (20 percent of calories from fat) lowers the odds of new precancerous skin lesions in people who already have the disease. Although the reasons for this aren't yet clear, research also suggests that eating more monounsaturated fats and omega-3 fatty acids may decrease the risk of developing BCC and SCC.

A number of antioxidants, flavonoids, and other plant compounds may also lower skin cancer risk, particularly those found in

citrus peel, tart cherries, pomegranates, tomatoes, and green and white tea. Since studies of antioxidant *supplements* and skin cancer are mixed, I recommend eating plenty of produce and sipping several cups of tea a day. Topical lotions containing green- or white-tea extract may also help protect skin when applied after sun exposure.

You can burn almost anywhere and anytime. You don't need to spend a sunny day at the beach in order to get burned: Up to 80 percent of the sun's rays can penetrate light clouds, mist, and fog. And the sun's intensity is actually stronger at high elevations like Vail, Colorado—where the air temperature may be cool—than it is at sea level on a Florida beach. Plus, sun can reflect off snow, sand, water, and concrete, meaning that you can burn even in the shade. (Car windows and windshields block UV-B rays that cause sunburns, but they let in UV-A rays that could give you a suntan if you're taking a long road trip.)

BCC and SCC are most common on the head, face, neck, hands, and arms, while melanoma typically occurs on the back (in men) and legs (women). But melanomas can occasionally pop up in surprising places, too: They can develop under the nails, on the tops or bottoms of feet, or in the nose, mouth, digestive tract, genitals, or eyes, suggesting that factors other than exposure to sunlight could be responsible.

My advice: I suggest being cautious but not paranoid about sun protection, since your body needs some exposure to sunlight to make vitamin D, which is necessary for bone health and may help protect against other forms of cancer. Limit direct sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., wear a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirts and pants when possible, and sunglasses. Use sunscreen that has an SPF of at least 15 and reapply it often. And check your skin regularly for new moles or other changes and see your physician annually to get a skin exam. 

In April, I was honored to be named one of *TIME* magazine's 100 most influential people of 2005. (I was listed in the Scientists & Thinkers category, defined as individuals who "have come up with the big ideas of our time," and recognized for forwarding the cause of integrative medicine.)

The magazine referred to me as "the guru of self-healing" and while I don't think of myself as a guru, I'm pleased that the concept of self-healing is receiving greater attention. When this newsletter was created nearly a decade ago, I chose to call it *Self Healing* because those words best embody the essence of my philosophy of health and medicine: that the body has the ability to heal itself. To me, that means healing comes from within, rather than from outside, the body. I believe that each of us is born with an innate healing system that has the capacity for self-repair and regeneration. I often use the example of cutting your finger: As long as the cut isn't too deep or infected, you don't need to see a doctor or take drugs. All you need to do is make sure it's clean and your finger will heal itself.

Even so, I think that some people today still believe that help has to come from outside if they get sick. Actually, conventional medicine has its place, especially in the treatment of emergencies and severe forms of disease. But the best approach—which I call integrative medicine—combines both conventional and alternative measures to help activate or unblock the body's own healing potential. Although self-healing has been the cornerstone of my medical thinking for more than 30 years and has hit home with consumers, only recently has it gained some attention from mainstream physicians.



Andrew Weil, MD

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Dr. Andrew Weil's

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Food on Film: Movies with a Message

Food doesn't just take center stage in movies like *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*. The following six films also feature food, and can teach valuable lessons about the role it plays in our society while they entertain you.

Babette's Feast. Babette, a French refugee, works for two sisters in 19th century Denmark, members of a puritanical religious community. When Babette wins the lottery, she uses her winnings to cook the sisters and their fellow villagers an extravagant French dinner. Half the fun is watching the preparation of the meal, which includes everything from quail to rum cakes; the other half is seeing the pious guests, who are determined *not* to enjoy the feast, give in to the sensuous experience. This film beautifully portrays how food can transmit love and gratitude.

Big Night. Two brothers in 1950s New Jersey try to save their Italian restaurant by impressing a visiting celebrity with a gourmet meal. Here, the food—which includes everything from rare delicacies to a simple omelet—represents the brothers' faith in the art of cooking and the American dream.

Eat Drink Man Woman. A famous Chinese chef who has lost his sense of taste still

cooks sumptuous Sunday dinners for his three adult daughters, even though he can no longer enjoy them himself. Like *Babette's Feast*, this witty film shows how love can be expressed through food.

Like Water for Chocolate. Another great portrayal of food as a vehicle for emotions: A young woman learns to suppress her forbidden feelings for her brother-in-law by channeling them into her cooking. Her passion and pain become imbued in the delectable Mexican meals she prepares—and those who dine on her creations are able to experience her desire, unhappiness, and other emotions.

Super Size Me. In this powerful documentary, the director eats nothing but fast food from McDonald's for a month and suffers poor health as a result. Despite denials by the company, this profound film is likely why the Golden Arches phased out their "supersized" meals last year.

Tampopo. A young widow and friends seek the perfect ramen recipe for her failing noodle shop. This quirky Japanese comedy skewers everything from spaghetti westerns to the connection between food and sex, and will leave you craving noodle soup. 

The Battle of the Belly Bulge

Scientists no longer view body fat (what physicians call adipose tissue) as just a passive storage site for leftover calories from too many Big Macs and too few workouts. Research has shown that fat cells are highly active and churn out hormones, enzymes, inflammation-causing proteins, and other substances that can be harmful to your health. Some scientists now think of body fat as a gland that pumps hormones right into the bloodstream, much as the thyroid and pituitary do. And not all kinds of body fat are created equal: It depends on where the fat is.

There are two major types of body fat, and one of them is known to be worse than the other. Visceral fat, the deep body fat that surrounds your vital organs, appears to be the real troublemaker as opposed to subcutaneous fat, which is found just beneath the skin's surface. Visceral fat is thought to be more dangerous since it's more metabolically active. It settles inside the abdomen, in the same vicinity as your liver, kidneys, and intestines.

Ample amounts of visceral fat can start to crowd out your internal organs, intrude upon their daily activities, and pollute the area with toxic substances. For instance, when visceral fat cells release their potent chemicals they can go directly to the liver, revving up cholesterol and triglyceride production, which is linked with cardiovascular disease and stroke. They can also play havoc with blood sugar levels and may promote insulin resistance and diabetes. Too much visceral fat near the heart can place undue strain on it and drive up blood pressure. While visceral fat is hazardous to your health and can trigger metabolic problems, subcutaneous fat is basically harmless, even if most people don't like it when it appears as cellulite or love handles.

About Apples and Pears

Your weight is not a good measure of visceral fat, and it does not tell you much about your health or fitness either. Plus, the number on a scale doesn't reflect how your body fat is distributed or how much muscle you have. One of the best indicators of visceral fat is the size of your belly. Place a tape measure around the circumference of your stomach: Men with waists that are 40 inches or larger and women with midsections broader than 35 inches are at greater risk for a host of health problems. (Recent research in the March 2005 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* suggests that a man's risk for developing type 2 diabetes may increase at a smaller waist size, indicating that the cutoff point for some health risks may actually be lower.)

People who are more likely to store excess weight in the abdomen have the so-called apple body shape, or what is known as central obesity. Those who deposit body fat primarily in their hips, thighs, and backsides are built like pears.

To some degree, hormones influence where body fat gets stored. Men are more likely to store excess fat in the midsection, especially as they get older. Storing more visceral fat may partly explain why men tend to develop heart disease

Weight Loss in a Bottle?

There's no quick fix for visceral fat in the supplement aisle. But there's some promising evidence from a small study of older people, who for six months took 50 mg a day of DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone), an adrenal hormone that declines as you get older, which may contribute to increased abdominal fat. In the trial, women reduced their visceral fat by about 10 percent while men lost 7 percent (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, November 10, 2004). However, these results are preliminary and the long-term health risks of taking DHEA are unknown. I don't believe there is any good evidence that CortiSlim, a blend of herbs and minerals, is at all effective at controlling obesity by reducing levels of cortisol, a stress-related hormone thought to encourage body fat storage. (For more on supplements that claim to promote weight loss, see the February 2004 issue.) To win the battle against a bulging belly, I believe the safest and surest way is to cut back on calories and get more physical activity.

earlier than women. Although there seems to be a physiological reason why women typically store fat in the lower halves of their bodies, especially as an energy source during pregnancy and lactation, a potbelly in men appears to have no advantage. In fact, the apple body shape in both men and women is associated with greater disease risk, mainly because fat gained in the belly includes visceral fat while fat in the thigh and hip region is subcutaneous. Even an otherwise thin person with too much abdominal (visceral) fat could be a candidate for high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and triglycerides, and heart disease. When evaluating disease risk, I don't consider factors such as body shape and visceral fat in isolation, but I look at them in a broader context of blood tests, family history, and lifestyle.

Genetics also has a strong influence on body shape, and your fitness level can affect where you store fat. While you can't change heredity, the best way to lose visceral fat and improve health is to follow a consistent program of sensible diet and exercise, not do a hundred sit-ups a day. The good news is that when you get more physical activity, fat in the abdomen tends to come off faster than fat elsewhere on your body. But research has shown that when people are inactive, visceral fat can accumulate rapidly.

Liposuction is clearly not the answer: When this surgical procedure removed an average of more than 20 pounds of abdominal fat in women, it did not significantly improve obesity-related risk factors, such as insulin sensitivity, lipid levels, and heart health (*New England Journal of Medicine*, June 17, 2004). That's because liposuction primarily reduces subcutaneous and not visceral fat. **SP**

Risky Business: Are These Health Threats for Real?

It's a risky world we live in—especially if you're to believe all the scary-sounding health threats that get passed along from friends, the media, or forwarded e-mail messages. It might cause you to think twice about many things, from your dental visit to your microwave oven to a soak in a hot tub. For example, your dentist wants to x-ray your mouth—but you worry about the radiation exposure. Microwaving some leftovers for dinner seems like a good idea—until you remember that heating plastic wrap could drive carcinogenic chemicals into the food it covers. Your neighbors invite you to soak in their hot tub—yet you wonder if you can catch any diseases from the water.

Some of these fears are unfounded, and fortunately you can reduce most of the real dangers by taking some common-sense precautions. I'll discuss five environmental concerns that I'm often asked about, and tell you how great a risk they might pose to your health.

Dental x-rays. Dentists typically take a series of “bite-wing” x-rays every year or two to help identify cavities, bone loss caused by gum disease, and other problems. X-rays use radiation to produce images; the amount of radiation that's produced by a full set of bitewing x-rays is about the same as what you'd receive from a day's worth of sun exposure. (You get about 360 millirems of radiation a year just from

activities like cooking with a gas stove, flying in an airplane, and even sleeping next to someone.) That said, many people, including myself, worry that *any* additional radiation could increase the risk of cancer. Yet, it's hard to say how risky dental x-rays are: There's no good evidence linking them to health problems, although a recent study found that women who had dental x-rays while pregnant were more likely to deliver babies with low birth weights (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 28, 2004).

My bottom line: I err on the side of caution when it comes to dental x-rays. I allow bitewings to be taken only every two years or so, and make sure that my stomach, chest, and neck are always protected by a lead apron. Plus, I pass on larger “panoramic” dental x-rays that show a broader view of the mouth: They may expose you to more radiation, and a recent study found that they have limited value as a diagnostic tool.

Electromagnetic fields. Also known as EMFs, these imperceptible energy fields are created by the flow of an electrical current, whether from power lines, appliances, or products like electric blankets. Evidence on this extremely controversial topic is mixed: Some research suggests a link between EMF exposure and certain types of cancer, but most recent studies have shown no risk. Still, I'm concerned that EMFs might not just trigger cancer but could weaken the body's healing system over time, possibly increasing the risk of degenerative diseases as we age.

My bottom line: Since the effects of EMFs are so unclear, I think it's best to keep your exposure to a sensible minimum. Large appliances like refrigerators actually tend to emit weaker EMFs than smaller ones, so I wouldn't worry about them. Keep electric clock radios (the plug-in kind) and other small appliances away from your head, and use a hands-free headset for your cell phone. Don't use electric blankets and heating pads, which generate strong EMFs and come in close contact with your body. And I'd try to avoid living near power lines or cell phone towers if possible.

Hot tubs and swimming pools. When not properly disinfected, hot tubs and swimming pools can harbor bacteria that temporarily cause rashes, respiratory problems, and diarrhea. On the other hand, tubs and pools that contain *too* much chlorine may trigger skin, nose, and lung irritation. As for infectious diseases like HIV and herpes, it's virtually impossible to contract them from water.

My bottom line: I once developed a nasty rash called hot tub folliculitis after taking a soak in a friend's hot tub. In retrospect, the tub looked dirty and I probably shouldn't have entered it. Stay clear of tubs and pools if the water is murky or green or doesn't smell right. If you're concerned about chlorine, you can cut your exposure to this toxic chemical by using an ion or ozone purification system to kill bacteria and algae in your pool or hot tub; I use Sigma Water Systems.

Mercury fillings. Mercury is bonded together with copper, silver, and tin to form amalgam that's used for dental fillings. Some holistic dentists and alternative practitioners claim that mercury fillings can release vapors into the body,

Deleting E-Mail Rumors

Here's the lowdown on three popular e-mail health rumors that might appear in your inbox.

Rumor: *Aspartame triggers health problems*, including multiple sclerosis, memory loss, lupus, blindness, and brain tumors.

Reality: There's no good evidence that this artificial sweetener (also known as NutraSweet) can cause such diseases. Still, symptoms like headaches and dizziness have been linked to aspartame, so I don't consider it nontoxic and I don't recommend it.

Rumor: *Shampoo causes cancer.* This e-mail warns that sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS), a common ingredient in shampoo and toothpaste, is carcinogenic.

Reality: According to the American Cancer Society and other experts, SLS doesn't cause cancer. Yet, it *can* cause eye irritation, allergic reactions, or canker sores in some people. If you're concerned, SLS-free products are available online and at health food stores.

Rumor: *Tampons contain asbestos.* Since asbestos “makes you bleed more,” manufacturers use it to increase tampon sales.

Reality: Tampons don't contain asbestos and never have, and there's no research to prove otherwise.

causing Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, cancer, and other health problems. Last year, an expert panel did conclude that some mercury vapor is released from dental fillings and absorbed by the body. But most of the people studied had mercury levels at or lower than what's considered harmful. In fact, according to one expert, you'd have to have about 500 mercury fillings in your mouth to produce toxic levels. With 32 teeth, that's impossible. Plus, the panel found no link between mercury fillings and diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. (By the way, the mercury used in fillings is a different variety—and probably less harmful—than what's found in contaminated fish.)

My bottom line: I used to have a mouthful of mercury fillings, but as they have broken down over the years, I've had them replaced with either gold or composite resin fillings. I wouldn't get any new mercury fillings, although I have to point out that we don't know the safety of these other types of fillings, either. However, I don't think it's worth the trauma

and expense to have mercury fillings taken out until they break down: Removing them may cause even greater exposure to mercury than leaving them in.

Microwave ovens. According to one widely circulated e-mail message, heating plastics in the microwave can contaminate food with carcinogenic compounds called dioxins. But experts say that there's no good evidence of this and that most plastic wraps don't even contain dioxins. I agree. It is true, however, that microwaving food in plastic trays or wrap can drive unhealthy plastic molecules into the food. In addition, I'm concerned that microwaving for long periods of time may alter the chemistry of food by creating new, unnatural proteins, which can't be good for you.

My bottom line: I only use my microwave oven to reheat or defrost food—for about two or three minutes, at most—and I never microwave food in plastic containers or wrap. (You should never use a microwave with a loose or broken door, which can leak radiation.) 

How Much Exercise Do You Need?

When the federal government released its updated dietary and exercise guidelines earlier this year, it included a new but controversial recommendation aimed at stemming the rise in obesity. It suggested that most adults should get an hour or more of exercise a day to control their weight. I'll offer my take on the new guidelines as well as tips for being more active.

The new guidelines. Unchanged from the 2000 guidelines is the minimum recommendation that adults get at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days of the week to promote overall health. (Currently, only 46 percent of US adults get this much.) Examples of moderate activity are brisk walking, bicycling, gardening, dancing, lifting light weights, and stretching.

For the first time, the guidelines also urged people wanting to manage their weight and avoid gaining additional pounds to get about 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity most days of the week. Sixty to 90 minutes of moderate activity daily was suggested for people trying to sustain weight loss. This latter amount matches the average time spent exercising by participants in the National Weight Control Registry

(NWCR), a continuing study of people who have lost at least 30 pounds and kept it off for at least one year. (For more on the guidelines, visit <http://healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines>.)

My opinion. I'm concerned the new guidelines could discourage many people, who may feel that getting this much physical activity is impossible and resign themselves to being couch potatoes. In my opinion, the guidelines don't adequately stress that the recommended amounts of exercise are *goals*, not all-or-nothing rules. Some activity is better than no activity, and it's being sedentary that is linked with the most health risks. Also, the guidelines don't emphasize that the recommended amounts reflect the *total* number of minutes spent on *all* types of activity (aerobic, strength training, and flexibility exercise) accumulated throughout the day. As a result, many people may think they're being asked to do a single 60- to 90-minute workout each day, which is not the case. Finally, while the NWCR participants choose to get 60 to 90 minutes of exercise a day, it's not clear that this much is *necessary* to sustain weight loss or to keep off fewer than 30 pounds.

My advice. I recommend that most people aim for 30 to 45 minutes

of aerobic activity (like brisk walking) at least five days a week as well as strength training two or three times a week and doing flexibility exercises (like stretching or yoga) several times a week. If you're attempting to lose weight, consider working toward 60 minutes of total activity on most days. If you're currently sedentary, start with a few minutes a day and increase gradually.

Here are some ideas for upping your activity level: Schedule times for exercise; mornings may be best for a busy schedule. Exercise with a friend. Walk whenever and wherever you can. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Play with your kids or grandkids. After loading up your grocery cart, push it a couple of times around the store. Lift light hand weights or do a stretching routine while you're watching television. You can find opportunities to be more active just about anywhere—if you take advantage of them. (To calculate the number of calories that you would burn by doing almost any activity, visit caloriesperhour.com.) 

Some ideas in this article come from James Nicolai, MD, medical director of the Franciscan Center for Integrative Health in Beech Grove, Indiana.

Ask Dr. Weil Salivary Hormone Tests; Thinning Hair; & More

I'm a physician who is often asked about salivary hormone testing. What's your opinion of these tests?

I do not consider salivary hormone testing to be reliable, whether it's done by an alternative practitioner or with a home health kit. I would not use the results from this screening as a basis to diagnose, treat, or monitor health conditions, unless I confirmed them against hormone levels obtained from blood tests. While it's definitely easier, quicker, and cheaper for a person to spit into a cup or lick a test strip, I'm not convinced that it's a better way than drawing blood to track hormonal levels. For one thing, salivary hormone levels can change quickly, whether it's over the course of the day or during certain times of the month. As a result, a saliva test might not accurately measure the amount of estrogen, progesterone, or testosterone in the body over time. Another drawback is that various foods, beverages, or drugs taken

shortly before the test can skew the results. What's more, the labs that analyze salivary testing may not produce consistent results or similar interpretations from one facility to the next.

What do you recommend for women with thinning hair after menopause? I'm experiencing it at age 50.

During menopause, the body produces more male sex hormones than estrogen, which can result in hair thinning and loss. Fortunately, hair loss due to such hormonal changes is usually temporary—hair typically grows back within six months to two years after menopause. Meanwhile, I think you'd do well to eat a wholesome diet that's rich in omega-3 fatty acids (found in flax, walnuts, and fish like salmon and sardines), which may play a role in hair health. I'd also supplement with gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), an essential fatty acid that is hard to come by in food. Take

The Seedy Side of Food

Come summer, baseball players might munch on sunflower seeds in the dugout (a healthier choice than chewing tobacco) and picnickers often spit out watermelon seeds (some varieties of which are roasted and snacked on in China). Tiny foods, seeds are the parts of plants containing embryos that can reproduce new plants. To provide the embryo with a source of energy, plants often store oils in seeds, making them high in fat. Some seeds such as flax, hemp, and pumpkin are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids, which are hard to come by in the diet and have inflammation-fighting effects, while others like sesame and sunflower seeds supply omega-6 fats.

Seeds haven't been studied as much as nuts for their health benefits, but both are good sources of fiber, vitamin E, and several important minerals. And for vegetarians, seeds are a plant-based source of protein, zinc, and iron, nutrients typically found in meat. However, seeds contain too much fat to be useful as a primary source of protein and are best enjoyed in moderation to avoid excess calories. People who have

diverticulitis should avoid seeds during a flare-up to prevent irritation of the intestinal lining. Store unshelled seeds in the refrigerator in an airtight container once you open the package. Here's a sampling of a few good seeds to snack on.

Hemp. Derived from the same plant that produces marijuana, hemp seeds contain virtually no THC (the psychoactive ingredient in pot). Eating them won't cause you to get high or fail a company drug test. I think hemp products have been unfairly stigmatized in this country as drugs instead of foods, but a recent court battle has changed this definition. Hemp seeds have a delicious nutty flavor. I prefer them dry-roasted: I spread a layer of the raw seeds in a dry skillet, stirring them frequently over medium heat until lightly brown. Next, I coat the seeds lightly with olive oil, remove them from the heat, and season with salt or soy sauce, or either garlic or chili powder.

Pumpkin. Native Americans originally grew pumpkins for their seeds rather than their flesh. Pumpkin seeds contain both zinc and beta-sitosterol, two compounds said to

protect the prostate. These chewy seeds have a peanuty flavor and make a pleasant snack; I buy raw, organic ones and keep them refrigerated. You can toast small quantities in a dry skillet, but use them up quickly; otherwise, they go rancid.

Sesame. Rich in copper and calcium, these flat, oval seeds add a nutty taste and crunchy texture to many Asian dishes. Sesame seeds are ground into a paste as tahini and blended with honey or sugar syrup to form halvah, a Middle Eastern candy, and they can also be sprinkled over steamed vegetables, salads, homemade breads, and stir-fries or blended into baked goods.

Sunflower. It's the center of this familiar yellow flower that provides these popular and tasty snacks. They are available out of the shell, but are fun to crack open with your teeth. Sunflower seeds are sold plain, salted, or flavored. Packed with vitamin E and selenium, two important antioxidants, these nutty seeds are great additions to trail mixes, yogurt, stuffing, granola, and baked goods, and there's even a spreadable protein butter for sandwiches. **SP**

Health in the News

Mediterranean Eaters Live Longer

The largest study ever done on the Mediterranean diet suggests that a man in his 60s who eats this way can expect to live a year longer than a fellow who doesn't. In research that spanned nine European countries and included more than 74,000 healthy men and women aged 60 and over, people who stuck more closely to the typical Mediterranean eating plan—which emphasizes fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, fish, and olive oil, and contains less meat, poultry, and dairy products and moderate amounts of alcohol—enjoyed greater longevity over a seven-year period. The lowest mortality rates were found in people living in Greece and Spain, who most closely stuck to Mediterranean fare. (*British Medical Journal*, April 8, 2005)

Comment: I've long championed the traditional Mediterranean diet, a favorite among nutrition researchers, and one that's essentially an anti-inflammatory diet. Research continues to find that people who follow it have lower rates of heart disease, cancer, obesity, and age-related health concerns, and now there's even stronger evidence that it's linked with longevity. People in this region also typically get more physical activity and derive more pleasure from food, two other key aspects of healthy living. 

offer either topical or systemic approaches. By the way, I'm developing natural anti-inflammatory skin products that will be distributed by Origins later this year.

I've been taking NADH to increase energy. Can this supplement be taken indefinitely?

NADH (nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide plus hydrogen) is a coenzyme involved in energy production in cells. It's also believed to increase the manufacture of certain chemical messengers in the brain. Your body makes NADH from the B vitamin niacin and may be able to absorb very small amounts of it from foods like beef, poultry, and fish. Manufacturers claim that supplemental NADH, sold under the brand name Enada, can boost energy. Preliminary studies on NADH have found improved symptoms in people with Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and chronic fatigue syndrome, but haven't looked at whether this pricey supplement can increase energy in healthy people. (Lifestyle measures and perhaps adaptogenic herbs are better bets for healthy people seeking to boost their energy levels; for more, see the September 2002 issue.) I think it's fine for people with the conditions mentioned above to experiment with NADH. So far, research hasn't shown any major side effects but more long-term studies are needed before we can say that NADH is safe to take indefinitely. 

one 500-mg capsule in the form of evening primrose or black currant oil twice a day. GLA will not stop hair loss or regrow hair, but many of my patients who take it report thicker, more lustrous locks after two months of use. You might also try the over-the-counter topical drug minoxidil (Rogaine). This medication appears safe, but the new hair it helps to grow will fall out within a few months if you stop using it.

How should I clean non-organic fruits and vegetables?

always wash produce before eating it, which is even more important when using non-organic fruits and vegetables. My technique is based on research done in 1996, which found that washing and peeling removed all traces of pesticides from more than half of the fruits and vegetables studied and significantly lowered them in the rest: Swirl grapes, berries, green beans, and leafy vegetables (outer leaves removed) in a dilute solution of dish detergent and water for 5 to 10 seconds, then rinse with warm water. I wash sturdier produce in the same solution, but scrub it with a vegetable brush while doing so. You can reduce or eliminate pesticide residues on acorn squash, bananas, citrus fruits, and corn on the cob simply by peeling or shucking them. Peeling, scrubbing, and rinsing will get rid of residues on carrots and potatoes. As for special produce washes, save your money: There's no good evidence they work any better than dishwashing detergent.

Are there any natural remedies for rosacea? I have it on my face and in my eyes.

The most natural remedy for rosacea, a chronic skin condition that typically causes redness on the cheeks, nose, forehead, or chin, is avoiding any lifestyle or environmental triggers that might aggravate a flare-up. Some common culprits include sun exposure, stress, hot or cold weather, alcohol, spicy foods, and hot beverages. Other forms of self-care include wearing sunscreen regularly and protecting your face with a scarf in winter, avoiding overheating when exercising, and using a mild facial soap.

Rosacea in the eyes is best treated with antibiotics to prevent corneal scarring and other serious complications. For facial rosacea, the long-term treatment is often topical antibiotics, such as prescription metronidazole gel. There's not a natural alternative to these drugs, but it's thought that antibiotics are effective in treating rosacea because of their anti-inflammatory effects and not because they fight bacteria. For this reason, you may wish to follow an anti-inflammatory diet by including more sources of omega-3 fatty acids that can limit inflammation, such as salmon, ground flax meal, and walnuts, while limiting omega-6s, found in many vegetable oils and foods made with them. I would also eat less meat and poultry and substitute soy, beans, and fish plus enjoy fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. You might also experiment with relaxation techniques, hypnotherapy, or traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). A TCM practitioner may

Multiple Sclerosis Care

Many years ago, a woman told me that when her doctor diagnosed her with multiple sclerosis (MS), he advised her to sit in a wheelchair for an hour a day to “practice” for when she’d be totally disabled. Today, the outlook is more hopeful for people with MS, a chronic neurological disease in which the immune system attacks the protective myelin sheath surrounding nerve fibers in the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms can include muscle weakness, trouble with walking, vision problems, fatigue, pain, and cognitive difficulties. Some people have only mild flare-ups, while others experience relentless progression of symptoms. Yet, recent research shows most MS patients don’t get progressively worse over 10 years, and some 75 percent of all people with MS say they’re satisfied with their quality of life.

The cause of MS remains unknown and there is not yet a cure, although drugs that can slow its progression became available in the mid-1990s. However, these medications can have significant side effects, and some people do well without taking them. The hormone estriol shows promise as a drug treatment, although more research is needed. Canada has just approved a marijuana extract called Sativex, which is sprayed under the tongue, as a prescription drug for MS-related pain; I hope it will soon be available here.

Help from Natural Approaches

Whether or not you’re on medication, I encourage you to experiment with the natural approaches below to enhance your health and lessen your symptoms. Some ideas are from my friend Patricia Ammon, MD, a family practitioner in Ridgeway, Colorado, who has MS and says that “your attitude is the single most important thing in keeping you feeling good,” and Allen Bowling, MD, PhD, medical director of the Rocky Mountain MS Center and author of *Alternative Medicine and Multiple Sclerosis* (Demos, 2001). Dr. Bowling’s center also has a website (ms-cam.org) dealing with natural approaches to MS.

Get the right fats. MS is more common in populations whose diets are high in saturated fat, and less prevalent in countries whose diets are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Limit saturated fat, found primarily in meat and dairy products, and eat oily fish (salmon, sardines, herring, or black cod) two or three times a week to boost your intake of omega-3s. If you don’t like fish, take an omega-3 supplement that provides 500 mg of DHA per day. Besides getting omega-3s, supplement with evening primrose oil, a good source of gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), an essential fatty acid that may improve

symptoms by acting as an anti-inflammatory. Take a dose that supplies 300 mg of GLA daily.

Exercise with care. Physical activity has been shown to improve muscle strength, mobility, and mood in people with MS. Yoga is a popular choice: Its gentle stretches can ease muscle spasticity, and its breathing exercises reduce stress, which can exacerbate MS symptoms. Plus, regular practice of yoga has been shown to reduce MS-related fatigue, and many poses can be done while seated or lying down. Swimming is a good option for aerobic exercise: Water prevents overheating, which can worsen MS symptoms, and it supports the body, making movement easier. Whatever activity you choose, take frequent breaks and don’t push yourself too hard. A physical therapist can design a fitness program that’s right for you.

Consider vitamin B-12 shots. Vitamin B-12 helps form and maintain myelin. While research is needed, Dr. Ammon reports that she’s seen a dramatic improvement in symptoms in several of her patients who have received periodic B-12 injections, usually once or twice a month. If you’d like to try B-12 shots, discuss this treatment with your doctor, who can administer the injections or even teach you how to do them yourself. For those who don’t like needles, Dr. Ammon suggests taking a sublingual (under the tongue) form of B-12, available in health food stores and online.

Take vitamin D. This nutrient may play an important role in MS. The disease is more common in northern latitudes, where people get less sunlight and produce less vitamin D. In a large study, women who supplemented with vitamin D (mostly from multivitamins) were less likely to develop MS (*Neurology*, January 13, 2004). Vitamin D may alter immune function in a way that benefits MS. And vitamin D and calcium are important to prevent and treat osteoporosis, which is common in MS patients. Because deficiencies of vitamin D have been linked with many other health problems, I’m now advising all Americans to take at least 1,000 IU per day, and I agree with some experts who believe that MS patients may benefit from taking up to 4,000 IU per day.

Explore herbs. Consider taking one or more of the following herbal and botanical supplements as well. Dr. Ammon says the ayurvedic tonic herb ashwagandha helps her counteract the fatigue and inflammation that often accompany MS; take 300 to 500 mg of a standardized extract, two or three times a day. Ginkgo shows promise for slowing cognitive decline in MS patients; take 240 mg a day. Lion’s mane mushroom contains compounds that may stimulate the growth of nerve cells; follow package directions. In animal research, turmeric blocked the progression of an MS-like disease; take 300 to 400 mg up to three times a day. It’s best to avoid echinacea and other immune-boosting products, since MS is marked by an overactive immune system. 

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The Latest on HRT

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Red Meat and Health

Folk Remedies

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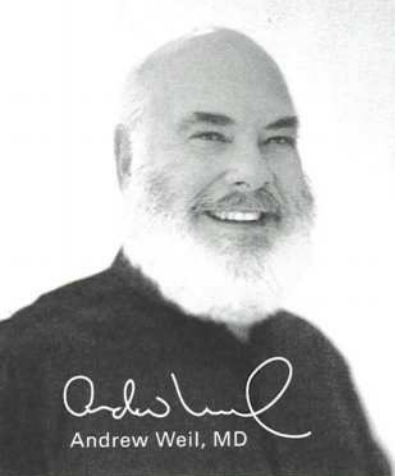
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ON MY MIND:

Baths

I take showers more often than baths, and I suspect a lot of men find standard bathtubs uncomfortably small. But many of my female friends use a warm bath as a ritual to unwind and neutralize stress. In Japan, women and men enjoy baths in equal numbers (the tubs are much easier to use). Soap is frowned upon in Japanese baths (you lather up elsewhere), so the main goal is simply to relax.

Soak it up. Hot and cold baths have different effects: Hot baths increase blood flow, soothe sore muscles and joints, and promote sleep. Try lighting candles, playing soothing music, and adding a few drops of lavender or chamomile oil to the water for a more relaxing soak. Refreshing in summertime, cold baths may tone the muscles, circulation, and heart, increase mental alertness, and energize you. Experiment with baths of varying temperatures to see how you react to them. 

Folk Remedies: Fact or Fiction?

For generations, moms have made chicken soup for colds, and women have sipped cranberry juice to prevent urinary tract infections. In recent years, studies have shown why these folk remedies work: Chicken soup has anti-inflammatory compounds that can ease nasal congestion, while cranberries contain substances that keep bacteria from gaining a foothold in the urinary tract. Yet, many old-time “cures” may be old wives’ tales: There’s no good evidence that eating gelatin (or soaking your fingers in it) will strengthen your nails or hair. And while a glass of warm milk contains some tryptophan, a sleep-inducing amino acid, it may be the bedtime ritual of drinking it that encourages slumber. Here is the lowdown on five other folk remedies.

Apple cider vinegar. In the 1950s, a country doctor from Vermont wrote a book that claimed a daily dose of apple cider vinegar (available as a liquid and now in tablets or capsules) could ease arthritis, aid digestion, promote weight loss, help with diabetes, and more. In a recent study, people with diabetes or prediabetes who drank a solution containing apple cider vinegar before eating a high-carbohydrate meal had smaller spikes in blood sugar afterward (*Diabetes Care*, January 2004). I think eating carbohydrates with a low glycemic load (like whole grains) is an easier and more palatable way to stabilize blood sugar, and I’m not aware of any scientific evidence that apple cider vinegar can help with other health concerns.

Cherries. Eating cherries is a folk remedy for gout, a metabolic disorder that can cause painful joint inflammation in the big toe. A 1999 study suggested that eating 20 tart cherries could ease pain as well as taking an aspirin or ibuprofen by inhibiting inflammation. In other research, eating Bing sweet cherries reduced blood levels of uric acid, which the body uses to form painful urate crystals during a gout attack. Both sweet and tart cherries are rich in antioxidant compounds called

anthocyanins that act as anti-inflammatories. For gout or other inflammatory conditions, take 1,000 mg of cherry extract twice a day—about what you’d get from 4 cups of cherry juice or a pound of cherries.

Cod liver oil. This oil was once routinely given to children because its high content of vitamins A and D was believed to promote healthy growth. It’s also rich in omega-3 fatty acids. In recent years, cod liver oil (available as a liquid or in gels) has been shown to help prevent ear infections and reduce risk of type 1 diabetes in children, and to slow the destruction of joint cartilage in adults with osteoarthritis. Even so, I’m wary of recommending cod liver oil. Many products are so high in vitamin A that toxic amounts could build up in your system. You do not need supplemental vitamin A—take mixed carotenoids instead. Do supplement with vitamin D (1,000 IU a day). For omega-3s, stick with oily fish or regular fish-oil supplements.

Gin-soaked raisins. Some people say eating gin-soaked raisins relieves arthritis pain. You’re supposed to use golden raisins, cover them with gin for a week until the liquid evaporates, and eat nine of the raisins a day. I know of no studies on this remedy, and have no reason to believe it works. Raisins have anti-inflammatory compounds, but it would take more than nine a day to get any benefit, and there’s likely not enough alcohol left in this preparation to dull joint pain.

Honey. Hot tea with this natural sweetener is a traditional remedy for sore throats, and the ancient Egyptians used honey topically to treat wounds and burns. Scientists now believe that honey’s antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties may help all of these health problems, and it’s proved effective in treating some burns. For minor burns, immerse the affected part in ice water for a few minutes, then apply raw honey. I know of no solid evidence supporting the folk belief that eating local honey helps relieve seasonal allergies. 

It's a shame that one of the most popular and desired workplace benefits—paid vacation time—is not fully used by 36 percent of Americans each year. Compounding the problem is that workers in this country get among the fewest annual vacation days of any in the world. Not having enough time away from work, what one consumer advocate for greater work/life balance calls “vacation deficit disorder,” often leaves overworked employees feeling physically exhausted and mentally drained. And as technology increasingly blurs the lines between work and home life and keeps us readily accessible, it's even more important to make a clean break for rest and relaxation.

I consider vacations a form of preventive medicine. I need a change of scenery and a chance to disengage from my usual pressures and routines. By getting away from the daily grind—without being tethered to it by cell phone, laptop, or pager—both body and mind can begin to feel rejuvenated and refreshed. Downtime has many upsides: Tense muscles unwind, knotted stomachs settle, and minds are freed to take in new sights, sounds, and experiences or ponder nothing much at all. Relationships can be rekindled, favorite pastimes revisited, or the day can pass leisurely with little on the agenda other than reading a good book, taking a long walk, or enjoying a delicious meal. Vacations need not be spent traveling to exotic destinations, since you can adopt a vacation mindset close to home. But Americans seem to have developed a culture of work, in which there's a fear of unstructured time and a sense by some people that they always need to be busy and doing something. In other countries, the idea of taking it easy and doing nothing is perhaps more acceptable.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored nine books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

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Making Mosquitoes Bug Off

With mosquito season in full swing, I recommend the following steps to deal with these pesky little critters.

Be less attractive. Mosquitoes might bug off if you wear light-colored clothing (long sleeves and pants are best in buggy areas) and don't use perfume, cologne, hair spray, or other strongly scented products. Although some people say that eating garlic or taking vitamin B-1 (thiamine) keeps mosquitoes away, there's no solid evidence to back this up. Need an incentive to lose weight? Overweight people tend to be more enticing to mosquitoes because they are larger targets and they produce more carbon dioxide (from exhaling) and lactic acid (from sweating), both mosquito attractants.

Apply a natural repellent. Most mosquito repellents contain the toxic chemical DEET. I prefer products containing geraniol, derived from lemongrass and other plants. In some research, this safe substance was more effective at repelling mosquitoes and other flying insects than products containing 10 percent DEET. One brand of geraniol-based repellents is BugBand; visit bugband.net to find stores that carry it. Another plant-based option is

repellents containing oil of lemon eucalyptus. In a pair of recent studies, this natural ingredient offered protection similar to low-concentration DEET products, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which in April endorsed it as an effective mosquito repellent. Oil of lemon eucalyptus is found in various lotions and sprays. I don't recommend citronella-based repellents, which appear to be ineffective.

Ditch the itch. For mosquito bites, rub Tiger Balm on the affected area. This Chinese herbal salve acts as a counterirritant, creating sensations of heat and tingling and diverting attention from the itch. Tiger Balm is sold at health food stores.

Also, I'm intrigued by a hand-held device called Click-Don't Scratch. You place it over a bitten area and click a button to deliver a low-intensity electric current, which in theory helps break down the irritating protein left behind by a biting insect and reduces itching and swelling. I have not yet tried this device, which is available at some outdoor stores and online, but I plan to this summer. (It's not recommended for those who have epilepsy or use a pacemaker.) 

Medical Marijuana: Debunking Common Myths

As we went to press in early June, the US Supreme Court made its long-awaited decision in the case of two California women who argued that federal drug laws did not apply to their use of homegrown, physician-recommended marijuana to treat debilitating medical conditions. A ruling in their favor would have essentially immunized the personal use of medical marijuana by people who grow and use it themselves, says my friend Ethan Nadelmann, executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance, a national nonprofit organization aimed at reforming the war on drugs. But the Court concluded that state medical marijuana laws don't protect users from a federal ban on the drug.

I find this outcome disappointing. I have long recommended marijuana for muscle spasms caused by multiple sclerosis (MS), for chemotherapy-related nausea, and as an appetite stimulant for people with wasting syndrome due to AIDS or cancer. And a growing number of studies suggest that marijuana also shows promise for problems ranging from Parkinson's disease to glaucoma, as I'll discuss below. Yet despite such evidence, the US government still considers marijuana a dangerous drug with no redeeming qualities. Eleven states now legally allow people to grow and use marijuana medicinally if a physician recommends it to them. But these patients are still breaking federal law and could be arrested and punished with fines, prison time, or both. I think it's incredibly foolish to continue to deny the medical benefits of what is basically a nontoxic herb with no known fatal dose. Here are common myths about medical marijuana.

MYTH Marijuana has no medicinal value. Critics say that marijuana is "definitely not a medicine," but studies suggest otherwise. Although more research is needed, there's now evidence in humans and animals showing that both natural and synthetic versions of marijuana may ease pain, nausea, and vomiting, enhance appetite and promote weight gain in people with cancer or AIDS, and reduce pressure in the eye that contributes to glaucoma. Pot may also relieve agitation in people with Alzheimer's and slow the progression of Parkinson's disease. And it's shown promise in alleviating muscle spasms caused by MS and ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Researchers suspect such benefits are effects of the plant's naturally occurring compounds called cannabinoids, some of which are also responsible for marijuana's psychoactive high.

In my experience, people who smoke marijuana medicinally aren't "potheads" looking for that high. Instead, they're ordinary patients—many of them older—who use it to counteract the side effects of conventional treatments or as a last resort when traditional medications offer no relief. People with chronic conditions may smoke several joints a day for years, while those with limited problems like chemotherapy-related nausea might taper their therapeutic use of marijuana as their symptoms improve.

These patients do have one legal alternative: oral Marinol, a synthetic version of the cannabinoid THC available by prescription since 1986. But many people say that they get better results from smoking marijuana, which acts faster and allows

them to fine-tune their dosage. Yet, the smoked herb has disadvantages, too: It's harsher on the lungs than oral delivery systems like vaporizers or sprays. That's why I'm pleased that Canada recently approved Sativex, a prescription oral spray of a whole marijuana extract, to help relieve muscle spasms in MS patients. It's unclear if or when Sativex will be available here in the United States, but its use in Canada (where medical marijuana is already legal) further legitimizes its medical effectiveness.

MYTH Marijuana is a dangerous drug. Research over the last several decades has found no convincing evidence that pot is a steppingstone to harder drugs, is physically addictive, or causes violent crime. Marijuana is linked to some health problems, including temporary short-term memory difficulties, temporarily higher odds of heart attack in middle-aged and older people, and the same respiratory concerns (such as wheezing, bronchitis, and increased lung cancer risk) as tobacco when used over the long term. Some research also suggests that teenage boys who smoke pot regularly for recreational purposes are more likely to later develop schizophrenia, but experts I trust say that these teens were probably genetically predisposed to this mental illness or were self-medicating the disease in its earliest stages.

Marijuana appears far less problematic than other drugs, including alcohol and nicotine. I agree with Ethan Nadelmann, who argues that our government takes a hard line on pot because it still views the drug as a symbol of the rebellious counterculture. Hopefully, the medical use of pot via sprays and vaporizers—rather than joints and bongs—will help shift the way people view its value as a treatment option. For now, I believe that the potential benefits of marijuana outweigh its risks when used medicinally, especially for severe or terminal illnesses like cancer or AIDS.

MYTH Americans don't support medical marijuana. In this case, the views of US politicians don't necessarily reflect those of their constituents. There's no question that our current government is particularly anti-drug. Yet, polls consistently show that more than two-thirds of Americans believe that doctors should be able to legally prescribe marijuana, while 40 percent think pot should be regulated like alcohol. According to Ethan Nadelmann, such support comes from both major political parties and all age groups.

The medical use of marijuana is now legal in Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington, and initiatives are pending in several other states. These laws mean that state-level penalties on the possession and cultivation of medical marijuana have been removed, but federal laws are still in place. I think it's a shame that our government continues to stand between patients and a drug with proven benefits. Stay tuned for further developments. **SP**

For more information on this topic, see *Understanding Marijuana* by Mitch Earleywine (Oxford University Press, 2005) or visit drugpolicy.org.

Hormone Therapy for Menopause: An Update

In the past, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) was prescribed to women as if it were an anti-aging vitamin, points out Joanne Perron, MD, an integrative gynecologist in Monterey, California, and a graduate of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine associate fellowship. Middle-aged women often took it not only to relieve menopausal symptoms but also in the belief that it was good for the heart, bones, and for cancer protection—and might even help libido, mood, and memory.

But all of that changed in the summer of 2002 when the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study made clear that the risks of using HRT to prevent chronic diseases outweighed its potential benefits. Prempro, a brand of HRT that combines estrogen and progestin, did not appear to protect some 16,000 postmenopausal women against heart disease, and it seemed to slightly *increase* their risk for heart attacks, strokes, blood clots, and—if used beyond four years—breast cancer. (It did decrease the likelihood of fractures and colorectal cancer.)

HRT's heyday was over; it was no longer the wonder drug that women could keep taking for decades. But what has happened as findings from other studies have been published? Is it safe to return to hormone treatment? Or are there drug-free approaches that may work better? I've asked Dr. Perron for her viewpoint as a practicing gynecologist along with Fredi Kronenberg, PhD, director of the Rosenthal Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at Columbia University, who is a menopause researcher.

Interpreting the Science

The WHI findings pushed gynecologists to rethink menopause and its treatment. I feel it helped move doctors away from the tendency to medicalize menopause and view it as a disease needing drug treatment by most women. Dr. Perron advises her patients that menopause is a transition and not a disease. The current approach to hormone therapy—if it's used at all—is to use the lowest effective dose to ease menopausal symptoms for the shortest time possible and for a woman to weigh the benefits and risks of continued use with her doctor every year. Scientists still do not know what is considered safe short-term use of HRT since the WHI study found an increase in stroke, blood clots, and heart attack within the first year or two of use. Such findings probably empowered some women, especially those at high risk for these conditions or those with high blood pressure or diabetes, to consider forgoing hormones and increased their willingness to explore alternative and lifestyle approaches.

Some experts say the WHI data was limited because the population studied was older and might have had underlying health issues to begin with. The average age of the subjects was 63, more than a decade beyond the average onset of menopause. Also, the WHI findings only looked at one particular type and dosage of HRT. Yet, all hormone therapies are not alike: There are many variations, dosages, and delivery systems, from pills and patches to creams and rings,

plus both individual hormones and combination treatments. It's still not known if the WHI findings were a result of aging, of the particular hormones taken, or of both.

Another arm of the WHI study evaluated the effects of estrogen only (as Premarin, made from the urine of pregnant mares) in nearly 11,000 healthy postmenopausal women who no longer had a uterus. This trial was halted in February 2004 after researchers found that estrogen alone did not protect against heart disease as was hoped and slightly increased the odds of stroke, a risk comparable to what was found with Prempro. Unlike Prempro, estrogen therapy didn't influence breast cancer risk (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 14, 2004). Because estrogen alone had no significant effect on breast cancer risk, some physicians have questioned whether the type of synthetic progestin used in the studies of estrogen plus progestin to help prevent endometrial cancer might be contributing to the health risks found.

The Women's Health Initiative Memory Study (WHIMS) looked at a subgroup of older women who were participants in either of the WHI hormone trials to learn whether taking estrogen plus progestin or estrogen alone affected cognitive abilities. In some 4,500 women aged 65 to 79 years who took Prempro, the two hormones had no effect on mild cognitive impairment but did increase dementia risk (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, May 28, 2003). About one year later, it was reported that nearly 3,000 older postmenopausal women who took estrogen alone also had an increased risk of dementia (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, June 23/30, 2004). Both studies suggest hormone therapy should not be taken to prevent Alzheimer's or improve memory.

Mind-Body & Menopause

Dr. Joanne Perron offers these ideas for coping with menopausal symptoms and cooling hot flashes, which are closely linked with stress.

Awareness. Recognize how you react to your symptoms and what instigates them. Caffeine, alcohol, chocolate, red meat, and spicy foods can bring on a hot flash, as may hot weather, fatigue, and anger.

Focused breathing. A few small studies suggest that regular practice of slow, deep breathing, known as paced respiration, promotes relaxation and reduces the frequency and possibly the severity of hot flashes.

Journaling. Let go of the chatter running through your head by writing down the thoughts rather than ruminating over them. You might even sleep better.

Yoga. The focused breathing and movement of yoga helps women to relax and feel more in tune with their bodies. It's also weight-bearing exercise that's good for bone health. Plus, physically active women appear to have fewer hot flashes than sedentary ones.

To find out if HRT has a different effect on disease risk when given to younger women (ages 40 to 55) who are recently menopausal, a new privately funded study is under way. Known as the Kronos Early Estrogen Prevention Study or KEEPS, it began late in 2004 and is slated to run for five years. KEEPS is a small pilot study; women will be given either low-dose estrogen (as a pill or skin patch), in combination with progesterone gel for those with a uterus, or a placebo.

Alternatives to Hormone Therapy

By some estimates, 65 percent of women abandoned HRT altogether in the aftermath of the WHI findings, but two years later a slight rebound occurred, with one in four of these women going back on. Drug manufacturers are now making lower dose versions of Prempro and Premarin, yet these new products have not been well studied to evaluate their long-term health risks. Besides switching to lower dosages, many women have tried different delivery systems and formulations in the hopes of reaping similar benefits but with fewer adverse effects.

There's also the choice between synthetic hormones and "natural" or bioidentical ones—those chemically identical to what a woman's body would make. For severe hot flashes, I'm most apt to recommend 17-beta estradiol, which is made from soy or yams. This form of estrogen is sold by prescription under the brand names Estrace, Climara, and Vivelle, for example, or as a generic version. For women who need supplemental progesterone to protect against endometrial cancer, I suggest the use of oral micronized progesterone, another plant-based derivative sold as Prometrium that is most similar to the hormone naturally produced by women. Compounding pharmacies can also custom-make bioidentical hormone formulations, but I think it's fine to use regular prescription products or generic versions instead. There have not been any large studies of these alternative formulations to demonstrate whether they are safer or have more benefits than synthetic hormones, but women seem to have fewer side effects when using them.

Thankfully, we're moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to menopause and toward an individual evaluation, where each woman makes decisions after she has discussed her symptoms, preferences, and medical history with her doctor. An important question to consider is how much your menopausal symptoms are bothering you or disrupting your life. Supplemental hormones might never enter the picture if a woman's symptoms are manageable with lifestyle strategies, such as diet, regular exercise, and relaxation practices (see box on page 4), sometimes in combination with alternative approaches, such as the ones discussed below.

Black cohosh. This member of the buttercup family is the most popular herbal remedy for hot flashes. One product, Remifemin, is the best studied; in small trials lasting less than six months, it tempered hot flashes at doses of 40 mg daily. Dr. Fredi Kronenberg tells me that results from four year-long studies of black cohosh should get published this coming year, including one that she's leading at Columbia. She says that in lab and animal studies black cohosh does not seem to have estrogenic effects in the body—which suggests

The Forgotten Females

Lost in the confusion over hormone therapy are those who have had surgically or medically induced menopause, which fortysomething women might go through after total hysterectomy or chemotherapy. Unlike natural menopause, there is no slow tapering of hormones over time, which makes for a difficult transition. Menopausal symptoms can seem more abrupt and severe, and bone loss is more of a concern. The standard treatment has been long-term estrogen therapy, which also benefits bone health. Now doctors are advising women to stay on estrogen until their early fifties, the typical age of natural menopause, and then to reassess hormone treatment. Scientists don't yet know if estrogen therapy in younger women poses the same health risks as were seen in older postmenopausal women treated with estrogen alone or even combination HRT. (Plus, the WHI studies only looked at one type of synthetic estrogen and one particular dose.) It still makes sense to use the lowest dose of estrogen possible to relieve symptoms.

that taking the herb won't increase the risk of breast cancer—and probably acts on a different mechanism than estrogen. Dr. Perron says that a woman might need doses of 80 mg daily or higher to quell hot flashes. Recent evidence suggests that black cohosh may be most effective in the early menopausal years (*Obstetrics and Gynecology*, May 2005).

Phytoestrogens. These plant estrogens are found in soy and red clover (as isoflavones) and flaxseed (as lignans). Soy foods seem to have a modest effect on hot flashes, but studies are inconclusive. Still, I think moderate consumption (one or two servings a day) of whole soy foods is a good idea for menopausal women. We don't yet know if phytoestrogens are safe in the concentrated doses found in soy (isoflavone) extracts or soy protein powders. You can also get phytoestrogens from lentils and other beans, and Dr. Perron encourages menopausal women to add two tablespoons of ground flax daily to get them. Phytoestrogens are also available in the form of red clover extract sold as Promensil. Short-term studies at doses of 40 to 60 mg daily found little benefit for hot flashes, and red clover's estrogenic effects on breast and endometrial tissue are not known. I think obtaining plant estrogens from soy foods is a much better option.

Natural progesterone creams. These over-the-counter creams, such as Pro-Gest, are rubbed into the skin on the hands or chest to prevent hot flashes. You can't absorb as much of the hormone from them, so they may not counter the effects of supplemental estrogen on the uterus (a reason progesterone is used) and therefore may leave women more susceptible to endometrial cancer. There's no good scientific evidence that wild yam creams ease menopausal symptoms.

Alternative healing systems. Both traditional Chinese medicine and homeopathy can treat the whole person with an individualized plan. I've had patients go this route and have found these systems useful, but there's limited research of their effectiveness for menopausal symptoms. 

Ask Dr. Weil Hoodia; Reflexology; Dried Fruit; and More

What's your take on the weight-loss supplement hoodia?

I would not recommend hoodia, a natural appetite suppressant from a cactus-like plant that's native to South Africa's Kalahari Desert. While this supplement has been one of the hottest selling products in the United States in the natural weight-loss category, there are no published studies to show it works in overweight people. Tribesmen in the Kalahari are said to eat a part of the hoodia plant before leaving on long hunting trips to dampen their hunger pangs, and some South African scientists later identified the plant's presumed active molecule. Called P57, it's found only in the *Hoodia gordonii* species and is believed to trick nerve cells in a region of the brain that makes a person feel full and consequently eat less. A pharmaceutical company has unsuccessfully tried to recreate a synthetic version of P57 to develop a weight-loss drug.

I'm concerned that this largely unproven appetite-control supplement has boosted demand for hoodia, and the plant's dwindling supply has landed it on the endangered species list. If you need another reason to hold onto your money, a recent test of 10 different brands found that six of them contained little to no hoodia.

Does reflexology work to ease various health conditions? Do you ever recommend it?

I'm more apt to recommend reflexology—a technique in which pressure is applied to “reflex points” on the feet or sometimes the hands thought to correspond with various organs and systems of the body—for aching feet, leg cramps, or some foot-related pain. I like it as a form of bodywork to the feet and I think it might be beneficial there because it

How to Stress Less at Work

In my travels to Japan, I saw news accounts of two medical phenomena first recognized in that country: *karoshi* (death from overwork) and *karojisatsu* (suicide from overwork). Although job-related stress appears worse there, I think it's a growing problem here in the United States. You should know how workplace stress can affect your health and what you can do about it.

Overworked and overwhelmed.

Americans now spend 20 percent more time on the job than in 1970, and many workers are candidates for burnout. A recent study by the Families and Work Institute (FWI) found one in three Americans are chronically overworked, while 54 percent have felt overwhelmed sometime in the past month by how much work they had. Factors linked with feeling overworked included frequent interruptions, too much multitasking, and having to work during off hours, such as while on vacation. Indeed, more than one-third of workers were not planning to use all of their paid vacation leave, presumably because they felt too overloaded to get away.

Health risks. If you're like most employees, you may be familiar with

the signs of short-term job stress, like when you have to finish a project on a tight deadline. You may get a headache or upset stomach, have trouble concentrating or sleeping, or be more temperamental with coworkers and loved ones. But once the project is done, you're likely to feel and act like yourself again.

However, chronic stress at work can lead to more serious problems. There's good scientific evidence that job strain—a combination of high demands and little decision-making authority—increases the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. In fact, stressful jobs can raise the blood pressure of workers even while they are sleeping at night. Other research suggests workplace stress increases the likelihood of musculoskeletal disorders like back pain and carpal tunnel syndrome, both of which often have a mind-body component. And left unchecked, job stress can impair mental health. In the FWI study, 21 percent of highly overworked employees had symptoms of depression, compared to only 8 percent of those who were not overworked.

What you can do. If you're frequently frazzled at work, there are

many things you can do to make the situation better. Talk to your supervisor about your workload or other issues affecting your performance. If your job requires you to juggle multiple tasks (whose doesn't these days!), learn to prioritize what's most important and devote the most time to that. If you can't focus on your work because of constant interruptions, set aside an hour each day when others know to leave you alone.

Also, practice breathing exercises, like the Relaxing Breath described in my books, while you go about your daily tasks. Limit caffeinated beverages, which will further jangle your nerves. Eat a nutritious lunch and pack healthy snacks to sustain your energy throughout the day. Take frequent stretch breaks to release muscle tension, and get outside for a quick walk at lunchtime to clear your head. Don't be a slave to technology 24/7: Avoid checking work e-mails at home, and let people know when you won't answer your cell phone, such as during dinner. Use your vacation time. If these suggestions don't help and your job remains overly stressful for you, it's best to get a different one. ☞

may help release endorphins, chemicals that naturally ease pain. I don't have any firsthand experience with reflexology as a reliable treatment for headaches, skin problems, chronic pain, or digestive disorders, as reflexologists may suggest. It's a safe and pleasant therapeutic approach that promotes relaxation, but I'm skeptical of claims that it improves circulation and frees energy blockages in other areas of the body.

I've been diagnosed with vulvodynia. What's your advice?

This chronic burning, stinging, itching, or rawness of the vulva (the area around the opening of the vagina) can make sex, exercising, and sitting painful for some women. Since its exact cause isn't known, treating vulvodynia can involve a lot of trial and error. First, I'd eliminate potential irritants like bubble bath, feminine hygiene sprays, and tight pants, and treat any underlying yeast or bacterial infection. Cool compresses applied to the affected area can provide temporary relief. Some research suggests that the pain of vulvodynia may stem from constant spasms of a woman's pelvic muscles, so I recommend doing Kegel exercises (best learned with a biofeedback machine) to tense and relax those muscles, which may relieve spasms and pain. Because vulvodynia appears to have a mind-body component, I think that approaches like breath work, meditation, guided imagery, or hypnosis might help ease pain. Plus, I've heard some reports that eating a diet low in oxalates—acid crystals that are found in foods like beans, chocolate, and leafy greens and excreted in urine—and supplementing with calcium citrate (1,000 to 1,500 mg a day) may help relieve vulvodynia. By the way, prescription antidepressants, anti-seizure drugs, and topical estrogen cream can all lessen pain in some women for unknown reasons, but I'd try the natural measures mentioned here first.

I know dried fruit is nutritious, but I worry about the sulfur dioxide used to treat it. Is this compound harmful?

Sulfur dioxide and related sulfites are preservatives used on some dried fruit, mainly to prevent discoloration. In rare cases, they could be harmful to people who are sensitive to the chemicals, with reactions ranging from mild (upset stomach, a rash, or throat irritation) to severe (bronchial spasms or anaphylactic shock). Some 5 percent of people with asthma are sensitive to sulfites and if they consume these compounds, they may experience an attack or breathing difficulties. While it's safe for the vast majority of us to eat dried fruits treated with sulfites, I'd avoid these food additives since they are primarily used for appearance's sake. The FDA requires foods with sulfites to say so on the label, but they don't limit the amount of sulfites manufacturers can use in them. I prefer dried fruits that are both organic and sulfite free. They may not look as nice, but they taste just fine. 

Send your health questions to Ask Dr. Weil, Self Healing,
42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

Low-Fat Diet & Breast Cancer Recurrence

Low-fat eating appears to reduce the odds that breast cancer will return in postmenopausal women who have completed treatment, says a study presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology in May. More than 2,400 women with early-stage breast cancer were either given nutrition counseling and followed a low-fat diet or they ate their usual meals. Five years later, cancer recurred in significantly fewer women who lowered their fat intake, and their overall risk for the disease was reduced by 24 percent. Women whose tumors were not considered to be estrogen sensitive fared even better on the low-fat diet, with a 42 percent reduction in risk. Although not yet published, this research is the first to demonstrate a direct link between a lifestyle change such as diet and breast cancer recurrence.

Comment: Since breast cancer tumors unresponsive to estrogen have worse prognoses and fewer treatment options than ones fueled by the hormone, this is a welcome finding. And despite criticism about the data's weak statistical significance and the possibility that the results stemmed from weight loss or other factors, this study reinforces my belief that a diet low in fat and high in produce is beneficial for women with breast cancer, as is regular physical activity.

Avoiding Surgery for Back Pain

Gentler approaches that don't involve going under the knife work just as well as surgery for chronic back pain, according to a recent study. Researchers looked at nearly 350 men and women with at least a yearlong history of low back pain. Half were scheduled for surgery, while the others underwent a treatment program that included exercise and physical therapy plus cognitive behavioral therapy, which helped the patients identify and overcome fears and negative thoughts related to back pain. Those in the rehabilitation program experienced similar benefits as people who had the operation. (*British Medical Journal*, May 23, 2005)

Comment: I think this research offers another reason to explore alternatives for chronic back pain and consider surgery a last resort. My first suggestion is to read Dr. John Sarno's book *Healing Back Pain* (Warner, 1991), which focuses on identifying the psychological factors related to back pain. The mind-body aspects of back pain are often overlooked by mainstream physicians, and mind-body approaches can be combined with other alternative therapies—such as yoga, exercise, and bodywork—to improve body awareness and posture and strengthen weak muscles. For more on treating back pain, see the June 2003 issue. 

Where's the Beef?

I haven't eaten red meat (or poultry) since 1970, when I became a vegetarian as an experiment and found that meatless eating agreed with me. Others might not eat meat for health, religious, or animal-rights reasons. Although most people are eating less red meat today than they did 30 years ago, the average American still consumes about 65 pounds of beef a year. Some concerns about beef are well known: In Europe, it's been linked to many cases of the fatal human version of mad-cow disease, and in this country has been tied to food poisonings and deaths caused by *E. coli* bacteria that may contaminate it. You should know about other health concerns associated with red meat (which includes beef, pork, veal, and lamb), and how to choose the healthiest meat if you wish to remain carnivorous.

The Red Scare?

When I was growing up, meat was considered an important part of a balanced diet, and my father—whose own father was a butcher—was a real “meat and potatoes” man. It's true that lean, quality beef is rich in protein, B vitamins, and iron and other minerals. But these days we know that it's possible to get such nutrients from a diet that's low in red meat or even meatless. In fact, many nutrition experts now recommend limiting red meat to a small serving (3 ounces cooked, roughly the size of your palm) or two a week, and preferably even less often. One way to do this is to not make meat the focal point of your meal, but to use a smaller amount as a flavoring agent to blend with vegetables or beans, or in salads. A good reason to limit red meat, especially beef, is that it's high in unhealthy saturated fat. Studies have linked red meat consumption with an increased risk of heart disease, while research shows that people who eat a diet with less red meat have low rates of cardiovascular problems.

Eating a lot of red meat also appears to boost the odds of developing rheumatoid arthritis, endometriosis, and stomach and esophageal cancer. Although it's unclear why, it may be that excessive amounts of red meat increase inflammation or simply crowd out disease-protective fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in the diet. Since cows, pigs, and lambs are high on the food chain, their flesh may contain more toxins, as well as residues of antibiotics and hormone drugs used to stave off illness and fatten them up before slaughter. Here's the scoop on certain varieties of meat:

Grilled. Grilling, broiling, or frying animal foods—and red meat in particular—can create toxic compounds that

have been linked to an increased risk of pancreatic, lung, and colorectal cancer. To reduce levels of these carcinogens, choose lean cuts of meat, marinate them, and flip them frequently on the grill to cut cooking time.

Smoked. Some research has linked eating smoked and cured meats like bacon, ham, and sausage to an increased risk of stomach cancer. Plus, one 2002 study found that people who regularly ate smoked sausages as children had a higher chance of being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis as adults.

Processed. Numerous studies suggest that people who often eat high amounts of processed meats such as hot dogs and luncheon meat are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes or colorectal or pancreatic cancer, or have a stroke, although it's unclear why.

At the Meat Market

To me, the healthiest thing to do is to decrease your consumption of red meat altogether—something that is easier than ever with all of the soy, gluten, and other tasty meat substitutes now available to choose from. (For more tips on going meatless, see the August 2000 issue.) Still, I know that many people enjoy meat and don't want to give it up. In that case, here are three labels to look for when shopping for beef. You will likely pay more for these options—and may need to look for them in natural food stores or online—but the beef is typically high in quality.

Grass-fed. Since the 1950s, beef cattle (who naturally eat grass) have been fed corn. Such a diet fattens them up, but can also make them sick, requiring the use of antibiotics. Some ranchers have recently returned to feeding cows a grass-based diet, and the resulting meat is higher in omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin E and lower in saturated fat and calories than grain-fed beef. It also tends to be tougher and more flavorful; the famed steaks of Argentina come from grass-fed cattle. Look for labels that say “100 percent grass-fed,” but know that such labels aren't verified by the USDA.

Natural. This vague label can mean almost anything—that the beef was raised without hormones or antibiotics, contains no additives or preservatives, or simply that it was “minimally processed.” You would have to contact each company to discover what they mean by “natural,” and such claims aren't USDA-verified.

Organic. To be labeled 100 percent organic, beef must come from cattle that were fed only organic grass or grain (not animal byproducts), weren't given antibiotics or hormones, and were given access to the outdoors, fresh air, sunshine, water, and pasture. Organic beef typically costs more, but this is the only label that's certified by the USDA, so you know what you're getting. 

next issue

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Advice for Worriers

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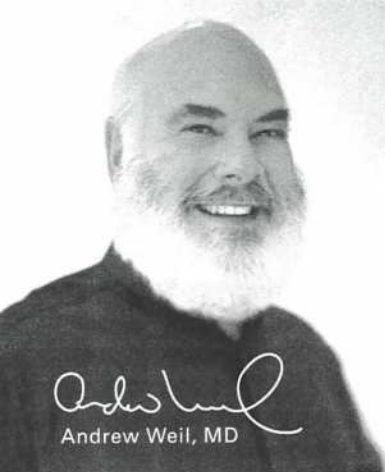
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ON MY MIND:

Titanium

I've heard that some pro athletes, especially baseball players, are turning to titanium for a competitive edge. A liquid form of this metal is put into colorful nylon necklaces, plus everything from knee braces and topical lotions to wristbands and clothing. Wildly popular among Japanese players, titanium products are now catching on here in the United States based on claims that they boost circulation, soothe muscle soreness, and reduce fatigue.

My take. Although some major leaguers might swear by titanium, I'm not aware of any good scientific evidence to support the health claims that are made for it. I'd say the same about the use of copper bracelets for arthritis pain. Athletes who wear titanium might feel or perform better because they believe that it works, making it more a lucky charm or fashionable gimmick than an alternative healing technique. 

An 8-Point Plan for Worrywarts

At age 116, Japan's Kamato Hongo was the world's oldest living person before her death in October 2003. Her recipe for long life was "not to worry too much." Many of the oldest old share her easy-going attitude: Research on centenarians indicates that they tend not to worry excessively and cope well with stress. Meanwhile, a recent study found that older people prone to constant worry are nearly 2.5 times more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease over the next few years than their less-distressed peers. Researchers suspect that chronic elevations of stress hormones experienced by worrywarts may damage areas of the brain that regulate memory (*Neurology*, January 25, 2005). There's also evidence that frequent fretting can reduce immunity, making you more vulnerable to infection.

I mention these findings not so you will worry yourself sick. Rather, I want to encourage you to reduce anxious thoughts and minimize their effects on your health. Of course, everybody worries sometimes, and not all worry is bad: It can alert you to real dangers and be a starting point for problem solving. But habitually expecting the worst to happen can drain your physical and mental energy. Here's my eight-point plan for worriers:

1 Take action. If you're worrying about something you can act on, address the problem. For instance, if breast cancer runs in your family and you're afraid that you will get it, learn about lifestyle measures that can lower your risk (see our February 2003 issue) and get regular mammograms.

2 Use positive imagery. Worry is the most common form of imagery, according to my friend Martin Rossman, MD, cofounder of the Academy for Guided Imagery. But rather than dwelling on imagined threats, you can replace them with positive images, he explains. For example, if you typically fear a car accident when a loved one is late arriving home, you could picture him or her on the way, singing along to the car radio.

3 Learn to relax. Regular practice of relaxation techniques such as breath work, meditation, and yoga can disrupt patterns of chronic tension and help you stay centered in the present moment rather than thinking about future hazards.

4 Write down your worries. By putting your fears down on paper, you can often see how truly exaggerated they are. And if you keep a worry journal and review it from time to time, you will likely see that many of your fears never come to pass.

5 Schedule a "worry time." Set aside a few minutes each day to worry, but allow yourself to fret *only* during that time. This will limit the impact of worry on the rest of your life and also give you a concentrated period to problem-solve.

6 Be physically active. Exercise can reduce levels of stress hormones, boost levels of mood-enhancing endorphins, release muscle tension, and offer distraction from your everyday cares.

7 Avoid caffeine and nicotine. These stimulant drugs will only make you feel more anxious. Also, steer clear of stimulant herbs such as bitter orange, guaraná, kola nut, yerba maté, and yohimbe.

8 Take a news fast. The media are a frequent source of worry and fear. Try going media-free (avoiding television, radio, print, and the Internet) for a few days each month and see whether it makes a difference.

If chronic worrying is interfering with your day-to-day life, you may have generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), which a visit to a mental health professional can help confirm. One effective treatment for GAD is cognitive-behavioral therapy, which can help you recognize and change distorted thinking and adopt better coping skills; to locate a therapist, visit nacht.org. I also find that working with a practitioner of Interactive Guided Imagery can be beneficial for anxiety problems; for referrals, visit academyforguidedimagery.com. 

A recent op-ed piece in *The New York Times* (June 6, 2005) spotlighted a major health problem that I believe deserves more attention: hospital-acquired infections. Betsy McCaughey, founder of the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths (RID), notes that one in 20 hospital patients gets an infection. These infections kill an estimated 103,000 people in the United States each year—as many as AIDS, breast cancer, and auto accidents *combined*. What makes these deaths all the more tragic is that hospital infections are largely preventable. Hospitals in Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands have greatly reduced infection rates through better hygiene practices. Yet, research suggests that more than half the time, doctors and other caregivers at US hospitals don't even clean their hands between treating patients.

One way to lower your risk of hospital infections is to ask the staff to wash their hands before treating you. (For more ways, visit RID's website: hospitalinfectionrates.org.) Ideally, you'd choose the hospital in your area with the lowest infection rate, but it's impossible to find this out. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention collect hospital infection data, but refuse to make it public. I'm pleased that at least six states—Florida, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Virginia—have recently adopted laws requiring hospitals to report infection rates, although no state has yet issued a report on how their hospitals performed. I encourage you to contact your elected officials to support such legislation; for a sample letter, visit stophospitalinfections.org.

Also, see page 3 to learn about a related topic: how to reduce anxiety before surgery and speed your recovery afterward.



Andrew Weil, MD

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Dr. Andrew Weil's self healing

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A Natural Memory Booster?

In general, I'm skeptical of supplements that claim to improve memory, and I believe your best bets for preserving brain power as you age are to eat a wholesome diet and to stay mentally, physically, and socially active. That being said, I think one of the most promising supplements for age-related memory problems is phosphatidylserine, or PS, and I'd probably try it first before experimenting with ginkgo or acetyl-L-carnitine.

What it is. PS is a naturally occurring fat that's a component of the membranes that cover brain cells. It helps keep these membranes flexible and also helps brain cells to conduct nerve impulses and to release adequate amounts of neurotransmitters. Some researchers believe the body's production of PS declines with age, which may contribute to fading memories. Small amounts of PS are found in foods including fish and rice. Supplemental PS was formerly made from the brain cells of cows, but concerns about mad-cow disease ended this practice. Today, PS is derived from soybeans.

Who may benefit. Some small studies suggest PS supplements may be helpful for treating age-associated memory impairment.

PS also holds promise for slowing the progression of early Alzheimer's disease, but more research is needed. (There's less evidence that PS enhances mental function in healthy people under 50.) Although most of these studies used PS from cow brains, some research indicates that soy-derived PS may have similar effects on memory. Dharma Singh Khalsa, MD, president and medical director of the Alzheimer's Prevention Foundation International in Tucson, says PS may be particularly beneficial for older people who have trouble recalling names, faces, and phone numbers.

How to take. PS comes in tablets, capsules, and softgels and is available at health food stores and online. It can be pricey, with some products costing \$1 or more per day. A typical starting dose is 100 mg two to three times a day. If this produces benefits after a month or more, you can try going on a lower maintenance dose of 100 or 200 mg daily. PS may have a blood-thinning effect, so talk to your doctor before trying it if you take anticoagulant medications or supplements such as Coumadin, daily aspirin, ginkgo, or vitamin E. 

Your Plan for Having a Successful Surgery

In preparing a patient for surgery, many conventional doctors' advice may be limited to "don't eat or drink anything before your operation" and "stop taking aspirin." Those are valid instructions: Anesthesia may cause nausea and vomiting, while aspirin can interfere with blood clotting. But an integrative approach also takes into account what supplements to add or eliminate before surgery, how your mind can influence the healing process, and which therapies can speed your recovery.

I realize that it's easy to feel as if you're at the mercy of your surgical team, and you might not think you have much control over what happens in the operating room. But over the years, I've found that patients who take an active role in preparing for and recovering from surgery tend to have better experiences: They feel more empowered and less anxious about the procedure, have less pain, and heal faster. In general, people who follow the techniques described below are amazed at how much more easily they get through surgery.

1 Meet your anesthesiologist. Busy schedules and managed care have made it difficult to meet with your anesthesiologist in advance, as was once the case. Still, research suggests that speaking with your anesthesiologist prior to surgery—even for a few minutes to review your medical history and discuss the type of anesthesia you'll receive—can significantly reduce preoperative anxiety.

2 Use your mind to influence pain. It's natural to feel worried or fearful if you're having surgery. But people who are stressed have been found to use more pain medication, stay in the hospital longer, have more postsurgical complications, and have lower immune function. To counteract stress and anxiety and greatly improve your odds of a successful surgery, I recommend trying one or more of the following relaxation techniques. Start practicing them at least a month before your operation, and ask for advance permission to bring a cassette or CD player and headphones into the operating room. Even when unconscious, your mind may still process healing statements or music.

- **Guided imagery.** Using visualization and imagery techniques before and after surgery has proven especially helpful for patients: A number of studies show that people who visualize themselves healing have less discomfort and anxiety after surgery, use less pain medication, and are released from the hospital sooner than those who don't. It even works for children: In one study, kids who were taught imagery before having their tonsils or adenoids removed had less pain and anxiety than those who did not learn the technique (*Pain*, July 2004). A good recording for anyone to try is Belleruth Naparstek's *A Meditation to Promote a Successful Surgery* (to order, call 800-800-8661 or visit healthjourneys.com).

- **Hypnosis.** Research suggests that using self-hypnosis to enter a trancelike state before, during, or after surgery can reduce postsurgical pain, anxiety, nausea, and vomiting, lower the odds of complications and blood loss, and decrease the

time spent in the hospital. Try a self-hypnosis recording such as Dr. Steven Gurgevich's *Surgery and Recovery* (call 866-506-1700 or visit tranceformation.com).

- **Prayer.** If you're so inclined, ask your friends, family, or church members to pray for you. Studies on spirituality and surgical outcomes are mixed, but knowing that you're in someone's thoughts may help ease your anxiety.

- **Music.** There's good evidence that listening to music before and during surgery can lower stress and reduce pain and pain medication use after surgery. Your best bet is to choose music that you personally enjoy and find relaxing.

- **Relaxation.** Other forms of relaxation, like breath work and progressive muscle relaxation (in which you systematically tense and relax your muscles), may also help ease stress, anxiety, and pain. For more on using mind-body techniques to speed recovery, see *Prepare for Surgery, Heal Faster* by Peggy Huddleston (Angel River Press, 2002).

3 Re-evaluate your supplements. In my experience, doctors either know very little about what supplements to take or discontinue before surgery, or they advise patients to stop taking all supplements as a precautionary measure. Some supplements can decrease blood clotting and should be discontinued about two weeks before surgery; these include ginkgo, garlic supplements, vitamin E, fish oil, and daily aspirin. St. John's wort can interfere with anesthesia and should be stopped about a week in advance. It's safe to resume taking these supplements about one week after surgery.

On the other hand, some supplements can speed healing and are safe to take if you're going under the knife. Vitamin C, for example, helps with tissue repair. My first suggestion is to ask your doctor for intravenous vitamin C—20 grams every 24 hours, from the time your surgery begins until your IV is removed. My colleagues and I have found that this can dramatically hasten wound healing. Still, no studies have been done on IV vitamin C, so many physicians are reluctant to try it. If your doctor won't agree, take 200 mg of oral vitamin C twice a day starting one week before your operation, which may also help. In addition, I recommend taking an herbal tonic like rhodiola, cordyceps mushroom, or eleuthero ginseng. Tonics are safe to take both before and after surgery and may help you recover faster; follow package directions.

4 Receive healing energy. Although more studies are needed, many people find that energy medicine techniques such as Therapeutic Touch and Reiki help them heal faster after surgery. These therapies—which involve no or light touching to balance a person's energy fields—are certainly relaxing and may boost immunity and relieve pain. Many nurses now practice energy medicine, and a growing number of hospitals offer these therapies; ask your surgical staff if yours is one of them. By the way, some studies show that pre- or postoperative acupuncture—which also seeks to influence the body's energy flow—can prevent postoperative nausea and vomiting. **SP**

Three Examples of Rethinking the Food Pyramid

After 13 years with the same look, the USDA Food Guide Pyramid was long overdue for a makeover. The results of that facelift were revealed to the public in April with the launch of the website mypyramid.gov. It took four years to create, and American taxpayers will foot its \$2.5 million cost. For that money, we have what's billed as an interactive food guidance system. Instead of a one-size-fits-all pyramid, there are now 12 different versions with dietary recommendations customized for a person's age, gender, and daily activity level. All this, of course, assumes that you have Internet access—one of the early criticisms laid against this renovation—since low-income or older people who lack computers can't take advantage of the new information.

MyPyramid's main icon, a triangle sporting six colorful vertical stripes representing different food groups and a stair-climbing stick figure accompanied by the message "Steps to a Healthier You," will likely be visible on cereal boxes, food labels, and school cafeteria posters in the coming months. But the image itself is cryptic and tells you little about how to eat. Unless you visit the website and click on the symbol's colors,



which are of varied widths at the triangle's base to emphasize those foods you need to eat most often, you have no way of knowing that (from left to right) orange stands for grains, green means vegetables, red is fruits, the thin yellow stripe indicates fats and oils, blue signifies milk products, while purple represents meat and beans. In its defense, the USDA claims

its "deliberately simple" new design is meant to motivate consumers to make healthier food choices and also get more physical activity. I'm glad that exercise was added to the new pyramid and feel this latest version is better than the previous one (which showed foods grouped horizontally and hierarchically, with grains as the foundation of the diet and fats at the tip to "use sparingly"). Also missing from MyPyramid is the former mention of "servings" and "portions." Foods are described in familiar measures like ounces and cups, with an occasional awkward reference to "ounce-equivalents."

While some might see MyPyramid as a helpful nutrition education tool, others consider it "an oversimplified chart with information that few will use." But the website received some 60 million hits its first day. And within 24 hours, there was a website lampooning the pyramid (mypyramid.org). Others quickly dubbed it McPyramid because the new graphics were created by a public relations firm with close ties to the fast food and snack food industries and also because critics felt the USDA caved in to the influence of food lobbyists and agribusiness with its dietary advice. Still more question whether the Department of Agriculture can be impartial in its dietary recommendations or should even be involved in the process, when a major focus of the agency's mission is to

support the nation's farmers and agricultural commodities. Nutrition education and the American diet might be better served by an agency devoted to health and medical science.

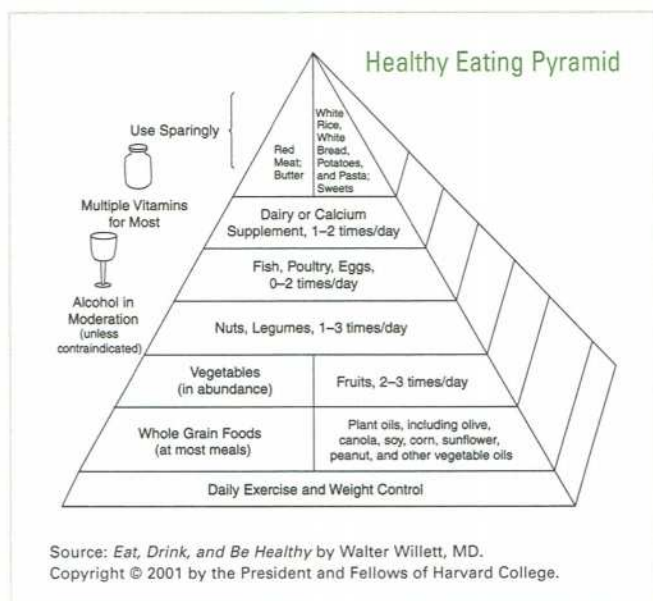
My quibbles with the new pyramid include that it makes no distinction between animal and vegetable protein, so that fish, red meat, poultry, eggs, beans, and nuts are all lumped in the same category. The description of this food category does contain a sentence that suggests "fish, nuts, and seeds contain healthy oils, so choose these foods frequently instead of meat or poultry." But that's hardly a ringing endorsement for eating more plant-based proteins, which are lower in saturated fat and cholesterol and may provide beneficial omega-3 fatty acids. I'm also not a fan of the increase from two to three daily servings of milk and milk products recommended by MyPyramid and the latest US Dietary Guidelines. I think this additional dairy serving should be optional at best, and I feel the pyramid makes only small mention of nondairy sources of calcium like leafy green vegetables, canned fish, and soy foods. Although a distinction is made in the grains group between whole grains and refined ones, I believe that *most*—not about half, as the pyramid advises—should be whole grain choices. I also don't think the oils category goes far enough in identifying the healthiest choices—namely, monounsaturated fats from olive oil, avocados, and nuts.

If you have a computer and haven't yet played around on the website, begin with the personalized "my pyramid plan" to get a broad overview of your suggested food needs and caloric intake (even though it fails to consider your weight and height). Delving into the practical advice and tracking your food intake are time-consuming tasks. Printed handouts (not web-based) as well as a Spanish-language and a children's version are all in the works.

Two Alternative Food Pyramids

I would like to tell you about some other food pyramids that are more in sync with my dietary recommendations for eating well and optimal health. They both reflect the latest scientific evidence, and neither has ties to the food industry. Unlike the USDA pyramid, both make a clear distinction between different types of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. To find out suggested daily servings and portion sizes, visit the recommended websites.

In his book *Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy* (Free Press, 2002), Walter Willett, MD, a Harvard School of Public Health professor, nutrition researcher, and champion of the Mediterranean diet, outlines his Healthy Eating Pyramid, and he lambastes the old USDA pyramid by saying that at best "it offers wishy-washy, scientifically unfounded advice" on what to eat and "at worst, the misinformation it offers contributes to overweight, poor health, and unnecessary deaths." His food guide (a basic graphic with words and no food images that's found online at www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/pyramids.html) is built on a foundation of daily exercise and weight control, two factors that greatly influence your odds of staying healthy.



Whole grains are placed at the pyramid's base as a cornerstone of this eating plan, and refined carbohydrates such as rice, potatoes, pasta, white breads, and sweets are at the tip in a "use sparingly" category to acknowledge these foods' rapid conversion to blood sugar. I also like that plant protein is separate from animal protein. He creates three different protein groupings: one for nuts and legumes that he recommends you eat most often, a second for fish, poultry, and eggs, and a third for red meat, which he advises to use sparingly. Dr. Willett's pyramid also recognizes that there are healthier fats from plant-based sources compared to fats found in meat and full-fat dairy products. And I agree with his de-emphasis on dairy and the option to take a daily calcium supplement instead. (He also suggests a daily multivitamin as nutritional backup.) I disagree with his decision to put whole grains and plant oils on the base of his pyramid, where I believe fruits and vegetables belong as the foods we need to eat most often each day. Some nutritionists find fault with Dr. Willett's placement of plant oils at the base because of their high caloric values, albeit of healthier fats.

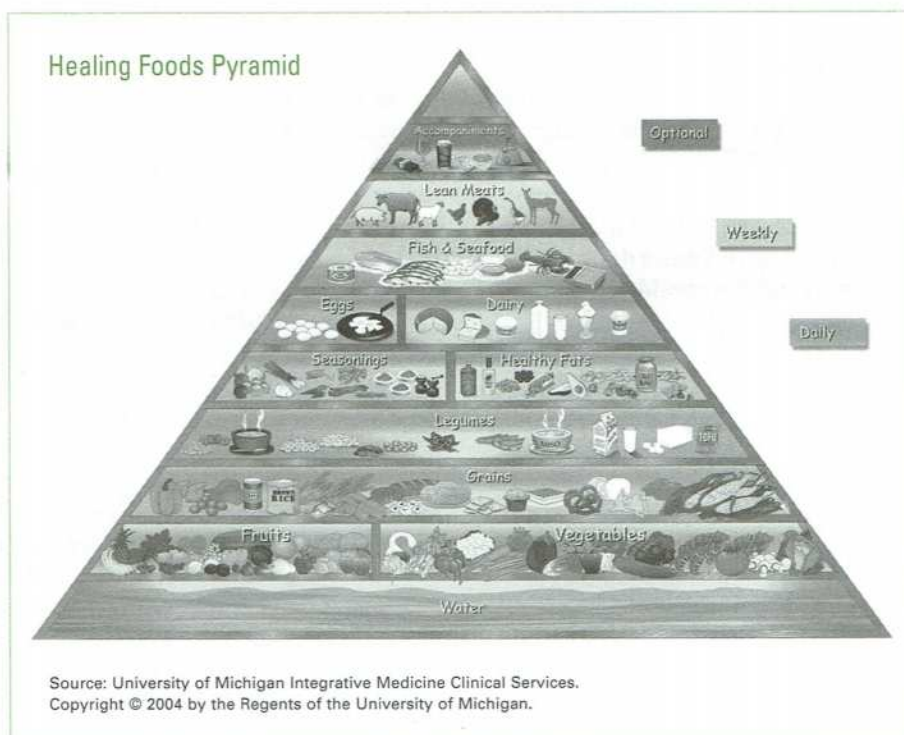
I applaud the ingenuity and attractive look of the Healing Foods Pyramid, the brainchild of Monica Myklebust, MD—a University of Arizona Program in Integrative Medicine graduate Fellow and now director of the University of Michigan Integrative Medicine Clinical Services—and her dietitian colleague. With its colorful illustrations, it offers a useful and straightforward graphic to help people of all ages become familiar with foods that are known to be healing or important to health. The Healing Foods Pyramid rests on a foundation of water, emphasizes the use of whole foods that support a healthful environment, and encourages mindful eating to truly

enjoy and savor your meals. While plant-based foods are its main focus, animal products are also included. The food illustrations (found online at med.umich.edu/umim/clinical/pyramid) show the whole animal in the lean meats category rather than a steak or drumstick. Dr. Myklebust tells me this was intentional, and these images are easily understood and especially well received by children.

Another innovation is placing starchy vegetables such as corn, pumpkin, white, red, and sweet potatoes in the grains group to more accurately reflect how they're processed by the body. Yet another unique touch is the "personal space" at its tip for a favorite food that doesn't contain perfect nutrients. Whether it's French fries or Mom's apple pie, this occasional special treat has emotional healing value to an individual.

This thoughtful pyramid has a seasonings group for healing spices and herbs, such as onion, garlic, and ginger, and its accompaniments category includes items rich in phytochemicals, like green tea, and my personal favorite, dark chocolate. I'm not crazy about the water at the base of this pyramid; although a vital nutrient, I would have preferred placing fruits and vegetables there or reinforcing daily exercise. Nor would I have made the dairy category seem like a basic requirement; I might have suggested nondairy sources of calcium or even taking a daily calcium supplement.

I realize that no one graphic can easily convey the healthiest way to eat. A food pyramid can be a useful nutrition education tool, but so is a dinner plate where you place fruits and vegetables on half of it, and a protein food and whole grains on the other two quarters. Learning cooking and food preparation skills can also teach good nutrition. In the end, it's not which nutrition education tool you use but how you put that health advice into practice. For information on Asian, Latin American, Mediterranean, and vegetarian food pyramids, see oldwayspt.org. Also, I'm currently developing an anti-inflammatory diet pyramid; stay tuned. 



Ask Dr. Weil Digestive Remedies; Enova Oil; and More

What do you think of the new cooking oil called Enova? It's supposed to promote weight loss.

Enova brand oil has the same amount of fat and calories as other cooking oils, but the type of fat in this vegetable oil is said to be processed differently in the body. Manufacturers claim that calories from the oil—which can be used in cooking, baking, and salad dressing—are more likely to be burned for energy than stored as fat, which supposedly encourages weight loss. Studies in Japan (where Enova has been available since 1999) and the United States suggest that using it in place of other cooking oils can result in minor weight loss. Still, I don't recommend Enova because the fat it contains has been altered in the lab. It also contains more polyunsaturated fat

than monounsaturated fat. I continue to recommend extra-virgin olive oil as your main cooking oil, due to its high levels of healthier monounsaturated fat and polyphenols that protect against cancer and cardiovascular disease.

What's your opinion of hydrogen peroxide therapy?

While I think it's fine to use hydrogen peroxide to clean cuts and scrapes or as a gargle for sore throat, other uses of this liquid are much more controversial, and I don't recommend them. Proponents believe that drinking diluted, "food grade" hydrogen peroxide found in health food stores or injecting it into the bloodstream can increase oxygen in tissues, improving conditions from multiple sclerosis (MS)

Constipation: 6 Steps to a Better Bowel

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both the United States and Britain claimed to be the world's "most constipated nation." Why vie for this dubious distinction? Constipation supposedly indicated that citizens worked so hard that they didn't have time to use the bathroom! Today, constipation is hardly something to brag about, and many people worry that it can fill your body with toxins or lead to disease. Fortunately, constipation isn't dangerous, although it can be uncomfortable. Here's my plan for keeping things running smoothly.

1 Rethink "regular." Having a daily bowel movement may give you a sense of well-being, but anything between three times a day to three times a week is considered normal. If you're going twice a week or less and your stools seem hard, dry, and difficult to pass, you're probably constipated. Pregnancy and conditions such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, or irritable bowel syndrome can trigger constipation, but its most common causes are lifestyle-related.

2 Eat well. A healthy diet of regular meals that are high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans can help prevent constipation. Six to eight glasses of water daily may keep

stools soft, but drinking too many caffeinated and alcoholic beverages can dehydrate you. Getting at least 20 to 40 grams of dietary fiber daily is good for general health. Yet, it's no magic bullet for constipation: Surprising new research shows that fiber improves constipation in only about 20 percent of people, while it may actually worsen symptoms in others (*American Journal of Gastroenterology*, January 2005). If you do increase fiber (as Metamucil, for example), add it slowly to avoid bloating and gas.

3 Move more. Physical activity promotes intestinal contractions that encourage regularity, while being sedentary increases the risk of constipation. I recommend 30 to 45 minutes of aerobic activity like walking or cycling on most days of the week.

4 Obey the urge. When you've got a busy schedule or limited access to bathrooms, you might ignore the need to go. Over time, you may simply stop feeling the urge, which can lead to constipation. Allowing yourself 10 minutes or so at a time in the bathroom can train your intestines to have regular bowel movements.

5 Look at your meds. Constipation can be a side effect of many medications, including some antidepressants, painkillers, anti-seizure

drugs, antacids that contain aluminum, and some drugs for high blood pressure. Ask your doctor about possible alternatives. Plus, calcium and iron supplements can also be constipating; if you take calcium, supplement with half as much magnesium, which has a slight laxative effect.

6 Try an herbal remedy. Contrary to popular belief, there is no good evidence that laxatives that stimulate the digestive tract can damage the intestines. If you must use a stimulant laxative, I recommend rhubarb root. Long used in Chinese medicine to treat constipation, I've found that this herb causes less cramping and other side effects than other stimulant laxatives, like senna and cascara sagrada. To avoid dependency, use rhubarb only occasionally, when lifestyle measures haven't worked.

Another option is triphala, an ayurvedic mixture of three fruits that acts as a mild laxative by helping to regulate bowel function. Don't expect instant results: Triphala is meant for regular use rather than symptomatic treatment. It may work best if you take it for 10 weeks at a time, with two-week breaks in between. (Rhubarb root and triphala are available online and at health food stores; follow package directions.) 

to heart disease to cancer. Yet, research doesn't support such claims: The idea that extra oxygen can kill cancer cells is based on faulty science. Plus, there's no good evidence that hydrogen peroxide can successfully treat any of the other diseases it's claimed to, and research shows that it doesn't even deliver a meaningful amount of oxygen to cells. On the other hand, studies have found hydrogen peroxide (when injected, ingested, or used in enemas) to cause problems like ulcerative colitis, seizures, and potentially fatal gas bubbles in the blood. Intravenous hydrogen peroxide has also recently been linked to the death of one MS patient. I'd stay clear of it.

Is the herb boswellia helpful for arthritis pain?

The gummy resin of the boswellia tree has a long history of use in ayurvedic (Indian) medicine to treat inflammatory conditions like arthritis and ulcerative colitis. I had been recommending boswellia based on its reputation, but ongoing research here at the University of Arizona indicates that ginger and turmeric, two other botanicals used in ayurvedic medicine, are better anti-inflammatory agents. So I have stopped recommending boswellia. To ease inflammation, take two 500-mg capsules of powdered ginger once or twice a day, or 300 to 400 mg of turmeric up to three times a day.

Do you recommend using aloe vera gel or liquid as a treatment for gastrointestinal problems?

I have recommended oral aloe vera for GI problems, but now I rarely recommend it because I consider other natural remedies more effective. For upper GI problems like heartburn, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and peptic ulcers, I'd try deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL). This herbal remedy increases the mucous coating of the esophageal lining, helping it resist the effects of stomach acid. Slowly chew and swallow two DGL tablets before or between meals. It's sold at health food stores, and is safe to use indefinitely.

Peppermint is also useful, especially for easing stomach distention (in the form of tea or after-dinner mints) and intestinal spasm (take one or two enteric-coated peppermint oil capsules three times a day between meals). Note that peppermint will worsen GERD by relaxing the sphincter muscle that controls the opening of the esophagus into the stomach.

For other lower GI problems such as irritable bowel syndrome and inflammatory bowel disease, I suggest marshmallow root tea; drink one cup as needed. Slippery elm, another option, comes as a powder made from the inner bark of the slippery elm tree. Mix one teaspoon of the powder with one teaspoon of sugar, add two cups of boiling water, and stir well. Drink one or two cups twice a day. Using one of these remedies along with making dietary changes and practicing a mind-body method regularly may ease your problems. The digestive system is a common area for stress-related problems. So relaxation methods such as breath work, meditation, and yoga can be extremely valuable. **SP**

Calcium, Vitamin D Curb PMS. Women who eat foods that are high in calcium and vitamin D are less likely to get premenstrual syndrome (PMS), according to a recent study. Researchers asked some 3,000 women ages 27 to 44 about their diets over a 10-year span. Women whose diet included about 1,200 mg of calcium or 400 IU of vitamin D daily were much less likely to develop PMS than those who got less. No such benefit was found for supplements of these nutrients, but there may have been too few supplement takers to adequately determine whether they help. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, June 13, 2005)

Comment: Previous research suggests calcium pills may also reduce PMS severity. I recommend 1,000 to 1,500 mg of calcium and 1,000 IU of vitamin D to all women from foods or supplements (this higher daily dose of vitamin D may also aid bone health and prevent certain cancers). Besides low-fat dairy products, you can also get calcium from leafy greens and calcium-fortified soy products or orange juice.

Folic Acid and the Brain. Taking a daily folic acid supplement may improve memory, suggests research presented at a June meeting of the Alzheimer's Association. Healthy people ages 50 to 75 who took 800 micrograms of this B vitamin daily for three years had memory test scores comparable to those 5.5 years younger, and their speed of recall was similar to those about two years younger. The study did not assess whether folic acid can prevent Alzheimer's disease.

Comment: There is every reason for adults to take supplemental folic acid in addition to eating foods high in it such as spinach, oranges, and strawberries, since it has cancer- and heart-protective effects. I continue to recommend taking 400 micrograms a day, until further research backs up the amount used in this study. Keeping active physically and mentally can also decrease your odds of age-related memory loss.

Fishy Findings? Fish oils might not help some hearts, according to Oregon researchers. In a study of 200 patients with implanted defibrillators, those who took about 2 grams of fish-oil supplements per day for roughly two years seemed to have a higher risk of irregular ventricular heart rhythms. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, June 15, 2005)

Comment: I question these findings, as do other medical experts on omega-3 fatty acids. This research flies in the face of several larger clinical trials that found fish-oil supplements to cause sizeable reductions in sudden cardiac death from fatal arrhythmias in heart attack patients. In my mind, fish oils remain a cost-effective treatment to help prevent, not cause, heart problems. **SP**

Surprising Disease Links

Certain behaviors can raise the risk of particular diseases: A diet high in saturated fat may promote heart disease, for instance, while smoking increases the odds of lung cancer. This is hardly news. But fewer people realize that some diseases themselves can actually boost the chances of developing another, seemingly unrelated condition. Swollen, bleeding gums can up your risk of having a heart attack. Acid reflux may trigger or worsen asthma. Here is some information on these and other surprising disease links, with advice on what to do about them.

Asthma and GERD. Doctors estimate that about 75 percent of people with asthma also have gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), in which stomach acid flows upward into the esophagus, causing chronic irritation. This is especially true for people whose asthma started in adulthood or gets worse after eating or lying down. The reason is still unclear, but some researchers suspect that acid reflux can injure the lining of the throat and airways, making breathing more difficult. Other experts believe that GERD's acid backwash may stimulate a nerve that causes airways to narrow, triggering shortness of breath. Whatever the cause, see your doctor if you have both asthma and symptoms of GERD, since treating acid reflux may also help to manage your asthma.

My advice: Ironically, some asthma treatments also aggravate GERD, so ask your doctor if the problem could be a side effect of any of your medications. I'd also limit or avoid common GERD triggers, like caffeine, alcohol, citrus fruits, tomatoes, spicy or fatty foods, large meals, smoking, and emotional stress. Avoid eating near bedtime, and consider raising the head of your bed to prevent acid backwash. Losing weight and wearing looser clothing can also help GERD, since extra pressure around the midsection can worsen reflux. Plus, deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL) increases the esophagus's mucous lining; slowly chew two tablets before or between meals. Look for DGL in health food stores or online.

Gum disease and heart disease. People who suffer from gum disease are almost twice as likely to have cardiovascular problems as those whose gums are healthy. Studies show that people with high levels of gum-disease-causing bacteria in their mouths also have thicker arteries and are more likely to have had a heart attack. This may be because gum disease causes inflammation elsewhere in the body, including the lining of arteries. Indeed, research shows that people with gum disease have higher blood levels of C-reactive protein, or CRP, a marker of inflammation and emerging risk factor for heart disease.

My advice: If you have gum disease, you can reduce your risk of heart problems by seeing your dentist or periodontist regularly for cleanings and other treatments. Brush your teeth at least twice a day, and floss and gently massage your gums at least once daily. Don't smoke, since smoking is a major risk factor for both gum and heart disease. I also recommend supplementing with 60 mg of the softgel form of Coenzyme Q10 daily, a heart-healthy compound that also appears to improve gum health.

Rheumatoid arthritis and heart disease. People with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) have been shown to be nearly three times as likely to have symptoms of heart disease as those who don't have this autoimmune condition. The odds of dying from heart-related problems are also greater if you have RA. The exact reason is still not clear, but the same inflammation that causes achy joints in RA could damage the walls of coronary arteries, contributing to heart disease.

My advice: Reducing inflammation may both ease RA symptoms and improve heart health. Follow an anti-inflammatory diet that's high in organic produce, omega-3 fatty acids, and monounsaturated fat and low in saturated, polyunsaturated, and trans fats. Getting regular exercise can improve joint stiffness and protect your heart. And consider supplementing with inflammation-fighting herbs like ginger and turmeric. You can find them both in New Chapter's Zyflamend (new-chapter.com); follow package directions.

Sleep apnea and high blood pressure. Loud snoring and daytime drowsiness aren't the only problems associated with obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), a disorder in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep. The oxygen deprivation that occurs during these episodes of not breathing can damage blood vessel walls. OSA can also make blood cells stickier and more likely to clot, which can worsen heart disease. About half the people with OSA also have high blood pressure, which in turn puts them at a higher risk of heart attack and stroke. Although people with OSA tend to be overweight, the risk of high blood pressure appears to be independent of the extra pounds.

My advice: Treating sleep apnea can reduce your risk of heart disease. Being overweight can cause fat to accumulate in the neck area, which may constrict airways and contribute to OSA. Losing even 10 percent of your body weight may improve apnea. Sleeping on your side also helps, since your tongue and palate can block your throat when you sleep on your back (sew a tennis ball into a pocket on the back of your pajama top to prevent yourself from rolling over during sleep). Avoid alcohol and sleeping pills, which can also make airways narrow. You might also ask your doctor about a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, a device that keeps airways open, greatly improving apnea. 

next issue

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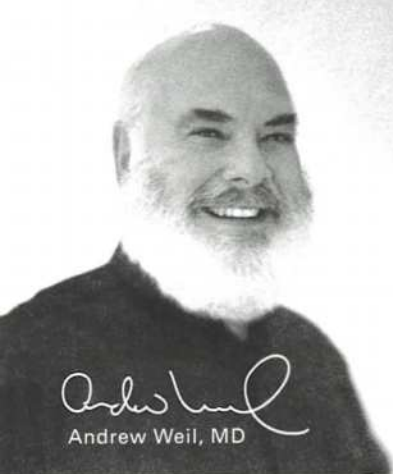
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ON MY MIND:

Chair Yoga

Older people or anyone who has difficulty doing yoga on a mat because of limited flexibility, a disability, or a temporary injury might enjoy chair yoga.

What it is: This gentle practice is done in a chair or wheelchair (with the wheels locked), which provides a stable base. Poses are adapted to the seated position and work both the upper and lower body. As with other forms of yoga, the numerous benefits include increased strength and flexibility, improved circulation, and experience with breathing and relaxation techniques.

My take: I think that chair yoga is a wonderful idea—even for desk workers and travelers. Classes may be taught in senior centers and yoga studios. Or you can practice at home with instructional videos such as *Seated Yoga with Carol Dickman* and *Sitting Fit, Anytime: Easy and Effective Chair Yoga with Susan Winter Ward*. 

Four Multipurpose Remedies

Many supplements are primarily used to treat one health condition, like echinacea for colds and glucosamine for osteoarthritis. But these four remedies are more versatile. They “multitask,” showing good results for different ailments.

Butterbur. This European herb (*Petasites hybridus*) can be helpful in both preventing migraine headaches and treating hay fever. In one study, people who took butterbur had nearly 50 percent fewer migraines (*Neurology*, December 28, 2004). The herb may act as a preventive by reducing inflammation and spasms in blood vessel walls. Other studies suggest it may be as effective as antihistamine drugs for allergies, without causing drowsiness. Butterbur appears to affect the immune system in ways that reduce allergic reactions.

How to use: For both migraine and hay fever, the suggested dose is 100 to 150 mg of butterbur extract daily with meals. The most common side effect is burping. Only use products that are free of toxic pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs). A reliable brand is Petadolex.

Coenzyme Q10. This compound, which sparks energy production within cells and acts as an antioxidant, has shown benefits for cardiovascular problems like angina, cardiac arrhythmias, and congestive heart failure. Unpublished research suggests it can reduce muscle pain caused by cholesterol-lowering statin drugs, which inhibit the body's own production of this compound. I often recommend CoQ10 to treat gum disease. Studies suggest it can help prevent migraines. High doses may help prevent breast cancer recurrence. And very high doses seem to slow the progression of Parkinson's disease.

How to use: Anyone on a statin should take 60 to 90 mg a day of the softgel form of CoQ10 at mealtime to maximize absorption. If you have cardiovascular disease or a family history of it, take 60 to 180 mg daily. For gum disease, use 60 mg a day. For migraine prevention, take 100 to 150 mg daily. To prevent breast cancer recurrence, take 180 mg a day.

The dosage used in Parkinson's research was 1,200 mg daily in chewable wafers.

Melatonin. Best known as a sleep aid, melatonin has other therapeutic effects. The pineal gland secretes this hormone at night to regulate sleep, and supplemental melatonin has proved effective for jet lag and in some studies for insomnia. Migraine sufferers have lower levels of the hormone, and a small study found that taking melatonin on a daily basis reduced migraine frequency (*Neurology*, August 24, 2004). And high doses may extend survival in people with metastatic cancer, perhaps by increasing levels of the body's own tumor-fighting cytokines.

How to use: For jet lag, take 2.5 mg of a sublingual (under the tongue) tablet at bedtime for a night or two upon arrival. You can take the same amount for occasional insomnia, but recent evidence suggests that 0.3 mg may be just as effective. The dose used in the migraine study was 3 mg, 30 minutes before bedtime. People with metastatic cancer may benefit from taking up to 20 mg at bedtime.

SAM-e. This substance, which is produced naturally by the body, is widely used in Europe to treat both depression and osteoarthritis. Some research suggests that SAM-e (S-adenosylmethionine) may ease depression as effectively as antidepressant drugs, and it works faster, often within a week. SAM-e appears to increase levels of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin. A recent study found SAM-e was just as effective as the COX-2 inhibitor Celebrex for knee osteoarthritis, although the supplement worked more slowly (*BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*, February 26, 2004). SAM-e may play a role in repairing cartilage and lubricating joints.

How to use: For depression or osteoarthritis, take 400 to 1,600 mg a day on an empty stomach. Use enteric-coated products of the butanedisulfonate form, the one that's most bioavailable. One drawback: SAM-e is expensive. Also, it may trigger manic episodes in people with bipolar disorder. 

As kids return to classes, parents should take on an assignment: to improve school lunches. This need is pressing, with childhood obesity rates soaring. Even if kids eat well at home, most face unhealthy choices at school, from junk food in vending machines to fast-food companies selling meals in cafeterias. And school lunch programs need a makeover. Currently, the USDA supplies schools with meat, dairy products, and some fruits and vegetables to prepare meals as they wish, provided they contain adequate nutrients but no more than 30 percent of calories from fat. The result is often kid-pleasing but unhealthy mainstays like hot dogs, pizza, and chicken nuggets.

Change is now afoot. Some schools are banning junk food and fast food; allowing vending machines to sell only healthier snacks like water, juice, and dried fruit (I'd add unsweetened, caffeine-free tea); or offering vegetarian entrées or soy milk. Such steps can require extra money and effort, so schools may not have the funds or motivation to initiate them. That's where parents can make a difference: Contact the principal or food service director and suggest solutions. Local farms often have extra produce they'll provide to schools for next to nothing. Organize taste tests to learn what healthy foods kids enjoy, and form a committee of parents, food service workers, and nutritionists to affect change. Lobby politicians for increased government funding of vegetarian foods. And teach your kids about healthy eating: Let them help you prepare wholesome, tasty bag lunches. For more ideas, visit healthyschoollunches.org or choiceusa.net.

If your doctor wants to go back to school to study integrative medicine, suggest the University of Arizona's Fellowship program (integrativemedicine.arizona.edu).

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Andrew Weil, MD

Dr. Andrew Weil's self healing

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Treating Warts, Naturally

Warts are a common nuisance. Physicians often cut, burn, or freeze them off by applying salicylic acid or liquid nitrogen, but they can stubbornly grow back, sometimes in greater numbers. These conventional treatments can be painful and may require multiple trips to the doctor.

I've found that warts are very susceptible to spontaneous healing, where belief can help activate the immune system. For that reason, I usually recommend mind-body techniques, like guided imagery, over conventional wart treatments. The key to guided imagery is practicing it regularly and choosing a visual image that you can relate to on a personal level. One man who was fascinated by steam shovels as a child got rid of a large wart by imagining a steam shovel scraping away at it morning and night. Another visualized a white light traveling through his body and eliminating the wart; a month later, it was gone. I have heard countless stories of miraculous wart cures, from the simple to the strange. Below are other natural approaches worth considering:

Hypnotherapy. Research supports this mind-body approach for warts, and one

study suggested hypnotherapy was a more effective treatment than salicylic acid. While in a hypnotic state, people are told to imagine the disappearance of their warts.

Duct tape. A study of 61 young people found duct tape may be more effective for warts than liquid nitrogen. One group covered their wart with duct tape for six days, then removed the tape, soaked the wart in water, rubbed it with a pumice stone, and reapplied new tape. After two months, 85 percent of the kids who used duct tape saw their warts disappear compared to 60 percent in the nitrogen group (*Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, October 2002).

Zinc. About nine out of 10 people who took zinc supplements for two months were cured of their warts (*British Journal of Dermatology*, March 2002). Zinc boosts the immune system, which may help fight off the wart virus. I suggest taking 30 mg per day of zinc picolinate, a form that's easily absorbed.

Folk remedies. Rubbing warts with a piece of cut potato or the inside of a banana peel are two popular folk remedies. Belief in such treatments may activate an immune response that causes warts to disappear. 

10 Natural Approaches to ADHD

Drugs for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have been under fire. In June, the Food and Drug Administration said it was examining a potential link between Ritalin and cancer, based on a small Texas study that found damage to the chromosomes of 12 children who had taken the drug for three months. The agency also announced plans to add new warnings about psychiatric side effects to the label of Concerta, due to reports of hallucinations, suicidal thoughts, and aggression. In February, Canada discontinued sales of Adderall XR (extended release) after it was linked to 20 cases of sudden cardiac death in adults and kids worldwide; the drug remains on the US market.

These developments have reinforced my belief that you should experiment with natural approaches to ADHD before turning to stimulant drugs like those above, which can also suppress appetite and interfere with children's growth and development. I'd also suggest getting a second opinion if your child is diagnosed with ADHD, since the disorder can be confused with other problems, including depression, learning disabilities, and vision or hearing problems. Plus, consider the "fit" between your child and his or her school: A high-energy youngster may thrive in a hands-on learning environment, while a "spacey" child may need a lot of structure.

Here are 10 natural approaches that can help with ADHD. Most of the studies discussed below involved children, but adults with ADHD may also benefit. Some ideas come from Sandy Newmark, MD, who has a pediatric integrative medicine practice in Tucson, Arizona.

1/ Cranial osteopathy. This method, in which gentle hands-on pressure is applied to the head and elsewhere, aims to free up restrictions in the movement of cranial bones and allow the nervous system to function smoothly. I think it may be especially helpful for children with ADHD who have experienced birth trauma or head trauma. To find a practitioner, send an SASE (60 cents postage) to The Cranial Academy, 8202 Clearvista Parkway #9-D, Indianapolis IN 46256.

2/ Dietary changes. Studies are mixed, but Dr. Newmark says he has no doubt that many children with ADHD have increased behavior problems after eating certain foods or ingredients. He suggests limiting refined carbohydrates (products made with flour, sugar, or high fructose corn syrup) to keep blood sugar levels more stable, eliminating artificial food colors and preservatives, testing for food sensitivities (see our October 2004 issue), and avoiding caffeine.

3/ EEG biofeedback. Many people with ADHD have brain-wave patterns high in "dreamy" theta waves and low in "alert" beta waves. EEG biofeedback uses high-tech equipment to help ADHD patients retrain their brain waves to follow a more focused pattern. Several studies have reported encouraging results, although EEG biofeedback can also be time-consuming and expensive: A full course of treatment may entail 40 sessions, and this approach is often not covered by health insurance. To find a practitioner, visit bcia.org.

4/ Green outdoor spaces. Simply enjoying nature can have a calming effect. A study of more than 400 children and

adolescents with ADHD found that after-school and weekend activities done in green outdoor settings—like parks, backyards, and tree-lined streets—were associated with fewer ADHD symptoms compared to activities done inside or in outdoor places without much greenery, like parking lots (*American Journal of Public Health*, September 2004).

5/ Homeopathy. A couple of studies in which children with ADHD were given individually chosen homeopathic remedies found improvements in parent ratings of behavior, although other researchers have criticized the design of these trials. I've also known people with ADHD who have benefited from this healing system. To find a homeopath in your area, visit homeopathic.org.

6/ Martial arts. In my opinion, karate, tae kwon do, and other martial arts can be extremely valuable to people with ADHD. These activities offer an outlet for excess energy, promote self-discipline, and increase concentration. Tai chi, a "soft" martial art, has been found to reduce hyperactivity and anxiety in adolescents with ADHD.

7/ Massage. Massage therapy is wonderfully relaxing, yet it has also been found to change brain-wave patterns in the direction of increased alertness. Small studies appear promising: In one trial, 30 children and adolescents with ADHD who got a 20-minute massage twice a week for one month rated themselves as happier following the sessions, and their schoolteachers reported improved behavior in the classroom (*Adolescence*, Winter 2003).

8/ Omega-3 supplements. Omega-3 fatty acids are important components of the membranes that cover brain cells, and people with ADHD seem to have lower blood levels of these healthy fats. Although more research is needed, I would encourage anyone with ADHD to take supplemental omega-3s. For kids, Dr. Newmark suggests using one of the children's formulas from Nordic Naturals (to order, visit nordicnaturals.com) and following package directions. For adults, I recommend taking a fish-oil product at a daily dose of at least 1,000 mg of EPA and DHA combined.

9/ Yoga. Besides neutralizing stress, regular practice of yoga can also improve concentration. In a small study, boys diagnosed with ADHD and stabilized with medication who attended 20 weekly yoga classes reduced their ADHD symptoms and showed improvement in attention and behavior. Those who also practiced at home showed greater improvement (*Journal of Attention Disorders*, May 2004).

10/ Zinc. Last year, two studies found that supplementing with zinc may improve behavior problems in children with ADHD. This mineral is important in the metabolism of fatty acids like omega-3s. Dr. Newmark advises kids with ADHD to take a children's multivitamin that includes 15 mg of zinc (100 percent of the Daily Value for kids ages 4 and older). Teens and adults can take an additional 15 mg per day. 

For more, see *Delivered from Distraction* by Edward Hallowell, MD, and John Ratey, MD (Ballantine, 2005), and *Healing ADD* by Daniel Amen, MD (Berkley, 2002).

The Trouble with Mercury, and What to Do about It

As a child, I could easily find liquid mercury in thermometers and chemistry sets and never thought of it as a health threat. But the truth is that this heavy metal is anything but benign. The Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland* is meant to portray a victim of mercury poisoning and the brain damage it can cause (mercury compounds were formerly used in hat-making). And tragedies in Japan and Iraq, where hundreds of people suffered from eating food contaminated with mercury, have shown us that getting far too much of the element can cause memory loss, tremors, other neurological difficulties, and death. Babies born to mothers with high blood levels of mercury are also at risk.

Mercury has been making news in recent years, due to concerns about increasingly higher levels of it in the environment, and many people ask me about mercury in fish, vaccines, and dental fillings. But there are different types of mercury, and they may not be equally harmful. Below, I'll try to sort through the controversies surrounding this topic, and offer commonsense advice for protecting yourself.

When the Mercury Rises

Mercury occurs naturally in the air, water, and soil, and has three major forms: metallic, organic, and inorganic. Metallic mercury is the silvery liquid found in many older thermometers; it produces toxic vapors on exposure to air. (Many state and local health departments now have programs that allow you to exchange these thermometers for newer, mercury-free ones.) The most common form of organic mercury is methylmercury, which accumulates in fish and can cause the health problems listed above. Methylmercury is created when inorganic mercury compounds combine with carbon. Coal-burning power plants are a major source of inorganic mercury, which is why many environmental organizations have lobbied the government to curb power-plant pollution. Here are three other sources of mercury.

Fish. When coal is burned, inorganic mercury is released into the air and eventually ends up in lakes, rivers, and the ocean. There, bacteria transform it into methylmercury, worms eat the bacteria, and fish eat the worms. A large fish like swordfish may contain high levels of methylmercury.

This compound is easily absorbed from food and can also cross the blood-brain barrier, damaging neurons. The biggest threat is to fetuses, babies, and young children, whose brains and nervous systems are still developing. It's estimated that one in six babies in the United States is exposed to high levels of mercury each year. That's why children, pregnant or nursing women, and women who may become pregnant are advised to limit their intake of certain fish. However, methylmercury's effect on adults is less clear: For example, a recent study found no strong evidence that high blood levels of mercury affect cognitive function in older people (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 20, 2005).

Still, I think it's a good idea for everyone to reduce their exposure to methylmercury. According to the Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA), young children and women of reproductive age should avoid eating large fish like shark, swordfish, and tilefish completely and limit their consumption of lower-mercury seafood such as salmon and shrimp to 12 ounces or about two meals a week. (See box at right for types of seafood that are low in mercury but high in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.) Canned tuna can pose problems, too: Women of childbearing age should limit their intake of albacore ("white") tuna, which is higher in mercury, to 6 ounces or one meal a week, and canned "light" tuna to twice weekly; young children should probably eat even less. If you eat tuna, I advise seeking out brands that have been shown in tests to be lower in mercury (although such fish can be pricier); in particular, look for products made from smaller fish. You can find such products by visiting catchofthesea.com, tunalovers.com, or vitalchoice.com.

Dental fillings. When bonded together with copper, silver, and tin, metallic mercury forms an amalgam that is used for dental fillings. Like the metallic mercury in a broken thermometer, mercury fillings can release some vapor, which is absorbed by the body. Some holistic dentists and alternative practitioners claim that mercury fillings can cause health problems such as multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, and cancer. But in December of 2004, an expert panel found that most of the people they studied with amalgam fillings still had mercury levels at or lower than what's considered harmful, and there was no apparent link between mercury fillings and diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Plus, it has been estimated that you'd have to have about 500 mercury fillings in your mouth to produce toxic levels, which is impossible.

I used to have many mercury fillings, but I've had them replaced with either gold or composite resin fillings as they have broken down over the years. To play it safe, I would

Getting Tested

If you're worried about your exposure to mercury, you might consider getting tested. One way to do so is with a hair analysis kit, which requires that you snip a sample of your hair and send it to a lab that will test it for mercury. Many websites and some environmental groups sell these kits for about \$25, but they may be less accurate than blood testing. They can only show levels of methylmercury from a few months prior, not your current exposure. Your most reliable option is to ask your physician to test your blood for mercury (check with your health insurance plan, as the test may not be covered). Levels above 5.8 micrograms of mercury per liter of blood or 1.2 parts per million in hair may be cause for concern, especially in children, pregnant women, or women of childbearing age.

Good Catches

When buying fish, I choose those that are both high in beneficial omega-3 fatty acids and low in mercury. Here's how different varieties of seafood stack up:

SEAFOOD	OMEGA-3s	MERCURY LEVELS
Salmon	high	low
Sardines	high	low
Pacific oysters	high	low
Catfish	low	low
Shrimp	low	low
Trout	high	medium
Flounder	medium	medium
Canned or fresh tuna	high	high
Chilean sea bass	medium	high
Shark	medium	high
Swordfish	medium	high
Mackerel	medium	high
Tilefish	medium	high
Grouper	low	high
Halibut	low	high

not get any new mercury fillings, but I also don't think that it's worth the expense and trauma to have mercury fillings taken out until they break down: Removing them may cause even greater exposure to mercury than leaving them in. In general, I think that exposure to methylmercury in fish and other seafood is far more troublesome.

Vaccines. Thimerosal, a preservative, contains another type of organic mercury called ethylmercury. It was once used in many of the vaccines commonly given to young children. Most scientists consider ethylmercury less toxic than methylmercury. By 2001, thimerosal was removed from most childhood vaccines in the United States, based on concerns that the total number of vaccinations typically given to children during their first six months of life could put kids over the limit of safe mercury exposure. A number of parents, politicians, and even some doctors believe that increasing rates of autism are a result of mercury poisoning from vaccines. Some research does suggest an association between thimerosal and this developmental disorder, yet many experts say these studies were poorly designed. And more studies actually show no link between thimerosal and the disease.

The controversial vaccines-autism debate has heated up recently, with vocal parents' groups alleging a government cover-up and gaining support from high profile figures like Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Autism appears to be caused by a mix of genetic and unknown environmental factors. The idea that thimerosal is responsible is worth investigating. But I have

reviewed the research, and while I sympathize with parents, I just don't think there's enough good evidence to make the connection. Plus, now that most vaccines are thimerosal-free, you would expect autism rates to drop, but they've actually continued to rise. I'd be more concerned about my child eating a can of tuna than being vaccinated.

Keeping Mercury Levels Low

Extremely high blood levels of mercury can trigger a number of health problems in both adults and children. But are your mercury levels elevated enough to cause concern? If you are curious, your physician can test you for mercury (see the box on page 4). We all have small amounts of this metal in our bodies, and the EPA currently sets the safety threshold at 5.8 micrograms of mercury per liter of blood and 1.2 parts per million in hair. Pregnant women who have mercury levels that are higher than these can deliver babies who may have learning disabilities, lower IQ scores, and behavioral problems. Right now, approximately 20 percent of American women of reproductive age have mercury levels that exceed the EPA's guidelines.

Yet, it's still uncertain how much mercury it takes to affect adults. Levels that create neurological problems in babies don't cause symptoms in their mothers. And while some adults who test high for mercury may complain of fatigue or an inability to concentrate, most of them don't show any signs of the major health problems that are associated with severe mercury poisoning.

With so many unanswered questions about mercury, I think that your best bet is to simply limit your exposure to this element. If a test shows that you have high levels of mercury, don't panic: Extreme treatments aren't likely necessary. Some alternative practitioners offer intravenous, topical, or oral chelation, which relies on amino acids and other compounds to bind to mercury and allow it to be eliminated in the urine. Chelation can be helpful in cases of severe mercury poisoning, but its value for moderately high levels is unclear. Chelation therapy—which is expensive and has side effects such as diarrhea, vomiting, and rashes—is also offered as an alternative treatment for autism, but there's no good evidence that it helps the disorder. Nor would I recommend taking supplements of cilantro, chlorella, amino acids, or garlic, all of which may be included in some practitioners' regimens for "mercury detoxification." They're harmless products, but no published human studies support their effectiveness in removing mercury.

Fortunately, no treatment at all may be necessary to eliminate moderate levels of mercury if you stop taking it in: Your body naturally rids itself of mercury via urine and stool, although it may take up to a year for levels to drop significantly. To encourage this process, you should drink plenty of water and try to have regular bowel movements. If you eat fish, follow the guidelines in this article for limiting intake of high-mercury species. 

For integrative treatments for high cholesterol, purchase the **Self Healing Special Report on Lowering Cholesterol** (see brochure).

Ask Dr. Weil Mononucleosis; Menstrual Cramps; and More

I'm 28 years old and recovering from mononucleosis. I can't get rid of the chest congestion. Any suggestions?

There are natural options. Dubbed "the kissing disease" because it's spread through saliva and mucus, mononucleosis often causes a fever, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes, and fatigue, which can last for weeks. To help your body fight the virus, I suggest taking the immune-boosting herb astragalus; follow package directions. Both eucalyptus and ginger are anti-inflammatories and can ease chest congestion. Put a small handful of eucalyptus leaves or a teaspoon of the essential oil in boiling water and inhale the steam twice a day. For a powerful ginger tea, peel a one-inch piece of ginger root, grate it and place in a pot with two cups of

water, bring to a boil, and simmer for five minutes. Add half a teaspoon of cayenne pepper and simmer a minute more. Add one or two cloves of mashed garlic and honey or lemon to taste. Let the tea cool slightly and enjoy a few cups a day.

I get bad menstrual cramps. Are there natural remedies?

Yes, there are. Assuming that your doctor has ruled out endometriosis, uterine fibroids, and other problems, your cramps are probably caused by your body's higher-than-average production of inflammation-causing compounds called prostaglandins. To ward off pain, try following a diet that's high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and low in polyunsaturated and trans fats, which promote inflammation.

Journaling: Self-Healing through Writing

Journaling, or expressive writing, is a simple, gentle, and inexpensive healing technique. I consider it a powerful therapeutic tool to learn more about yourself and become aware of how your mind and emotions can influence you physically. Journaling does not require much time, equipment, or training, and can be done anytime or anywhere. I frequently suggest it to those with chronic illnesses, particularly autoimmune disorders, but writing down your thoughts can be valuable for anyone, whether healthy or not. Journaling should not replace medical treatment. (It can be used together with mental health counseling to help work through issues.)

How it helps. Expressing yourself on paper can be a creative outlet and a good way to release feelings that you might otherwise hide or suppress. Unlike a health diary, in which you might log your day's activities and symptoms, journaling helps you to look inward in private and come up with fresh insights to solve problems. Because it helps you relax and reduce stress, expressive writing may improve immune function and overall health. Journaling might bring up deep-seated emotions, so you might feel sad or upset

right after a session. But over time, people typically feel calmer, happier, and more accepting of themselves.

The evidence. Research done in the 1980s found that healthy adults who wrote about emotionally difficult topics for roughly 20 minutes a day on four consecutive days showed stronger immunity and over the following several months made 43 percent fewer doctors' visits than people who wrote about less meaningful topics. In a widely publicized study, 112 people with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis who wrote about stressful experiences for 20 minutes daily over three days showed improvements in health status compared to controls (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 14, 1999). But no benefits were seen in recent research on asthma and arthritis patients who wrote about either stressful or positive experiences. Other evidence suggests less pain and fatigue in women who have fibromyalgia (*Psychosomatic Medicine*, March–April 2005), reductions in high blood pressure (*Journal of Health Psychology*, March 2005), and improved sleep in terminal cancer patients from expressive writing.

How to journal. Find a relaxing place to journal. Use pen or pencil and paper, or a computer. Date your

entry to track any patterns or tendencies; for example, you might notice that certain behaviors or symptoms occur whenever you're stressed. Start by writing about something that's upsetting or troubling in your life, either past or present. Describe in detail how you feel about this event, both then and now; reflect on how it affects you physically and mentally. Be honest and open about your feelings. Don't concern yourself with spelling, grammar, or punctuation; just let your thoughts flow freely, as these words are for your eyes only. Before finishing, write what you may have learned from this event or how you've grown. Spend about 20 minutes daily journaling and do it for three or four days in a row, writing either about the same experience or a different one. You can journal regularly or as needed.

Resources. You can learn journaling by simply doing it or from books like *Writing to Heal* by James Pennebaker, PhD (New Harbinger, 2004), and *Journal to the Self* by Kathleen Adams (Warner, 1990). For advice, visit journaltherapy.com, which lists journal therapists who can work with you individually. Journaling classes may be taught at adult education or holistic learning centers. **SP**

I'd also get plenty of omega-3 fatty acids (found in flax, walnuts, and fish like salmon and sardines), which appear to ease menstrual cramps. Regular exercise can increase levels of endorphins, your body's natural painkillers, which may ease cramps. Since stress can increase the likelihood of cramps, practice a relaxation method like breath work or meditation.

Wearable heat wraps like ThermaCare can also lessen the pain of cramps, as may taking the herb cramp bark in tea, tincture, or tablet form or sipping a daily cup or two of raspberry leaf tea. Calcium and magnesium may help by acting as muscle relaxants; get at least 1,200 mg of calcium a day from food, supplements, or both, and half the amount of magnesium. Some of my patients with painful cramps have gotten relief by visiting a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine. And while not natural, a course of pain-relieving ibuprofen or naproxen can be helpful at reducing prostaglandins when started a few days *before* your period, rather than waiting until cramps start. The trick is staying ahead of the pain.

In your February article on vitamin E, you didn't mention Ester-E. Is it any better than other vitamin E supplements?

Sold by various supplement makers, Ester-E is a patented form of vitamin E made by combining alpha-tocopherol with a phosphate molecule. Research in animals suggests it may be better absorbed than ordinary alpha-tocopherol, and marketers claim that Ester-E is "body-ready" and "highly bioactive." However, there is no evidence in humans that it's better absorbed than other forms of vitamin E. Plus, it lacks the range of healthful compounds that make up the vitamin E family, which is why I continue to recommend products that contain both mixed tocopherols and mixed tocotrienols. My next best choice would be mixed natural tocopherols.

What's your opinion of flourless breads?

I find flourless breads to be very dense and heavy. They are often made from sprouted grains—like barley, wheat berries, and spelt—instead of flour and sold at health food stores. To sprout the grains (beans, nuts, or seeds can also be used), they're soaked in water to release enzymes, drained, and kept at room temperature and rinsed regularly over several days. The sprouts are then ground up, made into dough, and slowly baked at low heat. For some people, the bread's appeal is that it's a "live food," meaning it has activated enzymes that some consider "living," or they like that it's made from 100-percent sprouted whole grains that are said to contain more protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals than traditional breads. Others say the bread is easier to digest because sprouting converts some of the complex carbohydrates to simple sugars. You can find recipes for flourless loaves, and they're sold as Essene, Ezekiel, and Manna breads, all suggesting biblical origins. While flourless breads are nutritious and very filling, I prefer whole-grain "peasant" breads like Old World-style rye or pumpernickel, which to me have more appealing textures. **SP**

A Blow to Echinacea? Echinacea doesn't appear to help prevent or treat the common cold, say Virginia researchers. They exposed about 400 volunteers to a cold virus and gave them one of three echinacea preparations or a placebo either before or at the time of exposure. After five days, the majority of people came down with a cold, even if they took the herb. Also, the researchers found that people who took echinacea had similarly severe symptoms, just as much virus in their bodies, and no higher levels of an immune-boosting protein than those who took a placebo. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, July 28, 2005)

Comment: While this study was well-designed, I do not consider it to be definitive, and I agree with experts who believe that doses higher than 900 mg a day (as used here) may be more beneficial. I'd like to see more studies of echinacea using different species, preparations, and doses to see if research can capture the effect attributed to it by so many users.

Easy on the Knees. Losing just one pound can make a real difference in the way your knees feel. Scientists in North Carolina looked at 142 overweight and obese older adults who had osteoarthritis of the knees. They found that for each pound of weight people lost, there was a four-pound reduction in pressure placed on their knees as they walked. That means that shedding just one pound can lighten the load on knees enough to slow the progression of osteoarthritis. (*Arthritis and Rheumatism*, July 2005)

Comment: This study confirms my belief that losing even a few pounds can benefit painful, arthritic knees—joints that bear most of your body weight.

Yoga Curbs Weight Gain. Regular yoga may help stave off middle-age spread, points out a recent study. Seattle researchers looked at the exercise habits of some 15,000 middle-aged men and women. They discovered that those of normal weight who did yoga for 30 minutes at least once a week gained about three fewer pounds over the course of 10 years than people who didn't practice yoga. And overweight participants who practiced yoga lost approximately five pounds during that decade, compared to a 14-pound weight *gain* for those who were overweight and did not do yoga. Researchers suspect that yoga may help shed pounds by cultivating body awareness, making people less likely to overeat. (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, July/August 2005)

Comment: This study adds to research that supports yoga's many physical and mental health benefits. A gentle beginner's yoga program may also be easier than strenuous aerobics for overweight or sedentary people to incorporate into their lives. **SP**

The Latest Thinking on Appetite

Your appetite is shaped by a complex mix of hormonal controls and other biological, psychological, and cultural factors. Everything from when you last ate and how many calories you consumed to your level of physical activity, the sight and smell of attractive food, and even food advertising can signal the appetite center in your brain, located in the hypothalamus. Researchers are hungry to get a handle on appetite, hoping to understand the physiological mechanisms that stimulate and control it. While I think that science has made some strides in this area, particularly in the last decade, we're still a long way from understanding how to modify appetite in any safe and effective way—and by doing so, helping to stem the rising tide of obesity. Still, I'd like to point out some interesting research on appetite and hunger as food for thought.

Appetite-controlling hormones. The hormones leptin and ghrelin are sometimes called the *yin* and *yang* of appetite control. Ghrelin, which was first discovered in 1999, is mainly produced in the stomach and signals the brain when you are hungry and need food. Levels of ghrelin rise before a meal and typically fall after you have eaten. Conversely, leptin, which is released by fat cells throughout the body, lets the brain know that you already have enough energy stored as fat and do not need any more food.

When leptin was first identified in the mid-1990s, it was hailed as the "obesity hormone" and drug companies thought they had a potential magic bullet for weight control. One pharmaceutical manufacturer paid more than \$20 million to license leptin after some promising studies found that mice who did not produce the hormone become obese. But this investment hasn't yet panned out. When the drug company later conducted the first human trials and gave overweight people a synthetic version of leptin, figuring higher levels would help them eat less, it did not. Scientists now believe that many obese people have high levels of leptin but their bodies are not sensitive to its effects: Their brains might not get the message to stop eating.

Meanwhile, in studies of ghrelin, researchers were surprised to discover that levels of this "hunger hormone" were higher in thinner people than overweight ones (*Diabetes*, April 2001). Studies also revealed that while ghrelin levels peaked in thin people before a meal (when they were hungriest) and sharply declined after eating, the hormone stayed fairly stable in obese people before and after a meal, perhaps reflecting why heavier folks might still feel hungry after eating. Right now, it's not known whether interfering with

ghrelin's function—for instance, by decreasing its production or blocking its receptors in the brain—might influence appetite or contribute to weight loss.

The sleep-appetite connection. Recent research suggests the amount of sleep you get can influence appetite-control hormones and even the food choices you make. When 12 healthy men in their 20s slept less than five hours on each of two consecutive nights, their levels of ghrelin, which triggers hunger, increased by 28 percent, while levels of leptin, which is linked with feeling satisfied, dropped by 18 percent. Plus, the sleep-deprived men reported a 24 percent increase in appetite and a stronger desire for sweet, salty, and starchy foods (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, December 7, 2004).

A similar hormonal pattern of increased levels of ghrelin and decreases in leptin was seen in more than 1,000 people ages 30 to 60 who got less than eight hours of sleep a night. What's more, the researchers noticed a connection between fewer hours of sleep and increased body fat (*Public Library of Science*, December 7, 2004). These two intriguing studies suggest that sleep loss appears to change physiology in ways that stimulate appetite and might encourage weight gain.

His hunger, her hunger. The first study of its kind to look at imaging scans of the brain found that men and women reacted differently to hunger and feeling content after eating. Researchers took pictures of the brain after 44 people—half were men, half women—had first fasted for 36 hours and then after they drank a liquid meal. When men were hungry, they showed more activity in the area of the brain that influenced the processing of emotions. When they felt full, men displayed more activity in an area of the brain that is associated with satisfaction while women had more activity in the region that affected vision. These findings led scientists to speculate that these gender differences might explain why men may feel more rewarded after eating (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, June 2002).

Food choices. Studies suggest that including some protein foods at meals makes people feel full longer, and so can including fiber-rich foods. Research also has found that people who ate a salad or a soup (made without butter or cream) as a first course at lunch ate fewer calories during their meal. This study's lead researcher, Barbara Rolls, PhD, author of *The Volumetrics Weight-Control Plan* (Harper Paperbacks, 2000), says that foods with a higher water content, like soups, fruits and vegetables, cooked grains, stews, and salads, do a better job at staving off and satisfying hunger. Such foods are also typically higher in fiber and lower in fat and calories. **SR**

next issue

Stress and the GI System

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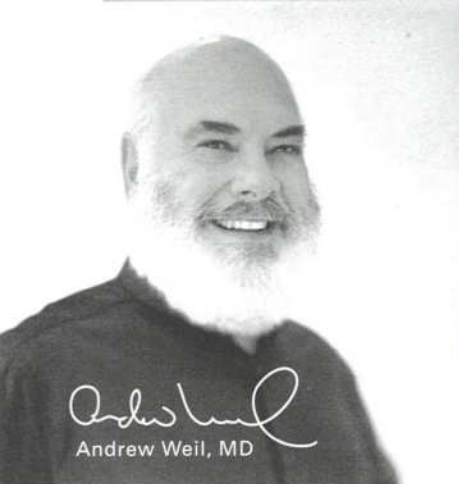
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OCTOBER 2005

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ON MY MIND:

Walk Mindfully

You don't have to sit still on a cushion to meditate. Walking meditation provides the opportunity to calm your mind while moving your body.

How to: Pay close attention to the walking process, being mindful as you lift, move, and place your foot with every step. Focus your awareness inward, noticing the rhythm of your motion and the flow of your breath. Walk leisurely and peacefully with a slight smile, enjoying the sights, sounds, and smells of nature around you. Let your worries fade as you walk for about 15 minutes—renewing your energy and spirit.

For an inspiring guide to walking meditation, take a look at *The Long Road Turns to Joy* (Parallax Press, 1996) by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen master who does this simple practice regularly and writes, "Each step brings a fresh breeze. . . . Kiss the Earth with your feet." 

Your mother may have told you that eating carrots is good for your eyes. While the beta-carotene in carrots may have protective effects, other nutrients appear more helpful in preventing and treating eye problems. I'll discuss some of them.

Flavonoids. Red and purple fruits and vegetables get their color from a type of antioxidant flavonoids called anthocyanins. They may protect vision by improving blood flow to the eyes and reducing free-radical damage. One such fruit is bilberry: This European cousin of our blueberry shows promise for treating diabetic retinopathy, an eye problem caused by elevated blood sugar, although studies have questioned its ability to improve night vision. Similar flavonoids called proanthocyanidins, found in grape-seed extract and pine-bark extract, may strengthen blood vessels in the eyes. These two extracts have also shown promise for diabetic retinopathy.

How to get: Eat berries, especially blueberries, frequently. Other dietary sources of anthocyanins are cherries, red grapes (and juice and wine made from them), pomegranates and their juice, red cabbage, and beets. If you aren't getting lots of flavonoids in your diet or if you have diabetic retinopathy, consider taking bilberry, grape-seed extract, or pine-bark extract; follow package directions.

Lutein and zeaxanthin. These carotenoids are found in high concentrations in the eye, which they help shield from damaging ultraviolet rays. They also neutralize free radicals that can harm the eye. People who eat more foods containing lutein and zeaxanthin are less likely to develop age-related macular degeneration (AMD) or cataracts, two common causes of vision loss in older adults. In preliminary studies, supplementing with lutein improved vision in people with either condition. An upcoming study will explore the effects of supplemental lutein, zeaxanthin, and omega-3s on AMD progression.

How to get: Eat dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale, and collard greens, all of which

are high in lutein and zeaxanthin. Other food sources include broccoli, peas, squash, corn, and eggs. Taking a mixed carotenoid supplement (10,000 to 15,000 IU daily) that contains lutein and zeaxanthin might also help preserve vision. In the preliminary studies, AMD patients took 10 mg of lutein per day, while cataract patients took 15 mg daily.

Omega-3s. Older adults who eat fish at least twice a week are about half as likely to develop advanced AMD compared to those who eat no fish. This benefit is likely due to fish's omega-3 fatty acids: DHA accumulates in the eye near light-sensing nerve cells, and EPA also has protective effects. Plus, a recent study found that a higher dietary intake of omega-3s can reduce cataract risk (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, May 15, 2005).

How to get: I suggest eating omega-3-rich oily fish (salmon, sardines, herring, or black cod) at least twice a week. Other food sources include walnuts, ground flax seeds, hemp seeds, and fortified eggs. Another option is taking a fish-oil supplement at a daily dose of at least 1,000 mg of DHA and EPA combined.

Vitamins C and E. Like flavonoids and carotenoids, these antioxidant vitamins help prevent free-radical damage to the eye. In a 2001 study, people with intermediate or advanced AMD who took daily antioxidant supplements (including 500 mg of vitamin C and 400 IU of vitamin E) plus zinc reduced their risk of disease progression. A recent study found that supplementing with vitamin E for 10 years or more slows cataract development (*Archives of Ophthalmology*, April 2005), and earlier research suggests that people who supplement with vitamin C for at least 10 years are less likely to get cataracts.

How to get: In addition to getting vitamin C from citrus fruits and vitamin E from nuts and seeds, I recommend supplementing with vitamin C (200 mg a day is generally sufficient) and vitamin E (400 IU of mixed natural tocopherols, or 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols). 

American companies are being crippled by health-care costs. In one survey, financial executives ranked it as one of their top three concerns. They fear that skyrocketing expenditures for health coverage of employees will boost consumer prices and make US businesses less competitive globally. I think rising health-care costs are becoming *the* major economic issue in our nation.

Despite managed care, everything from the exorbitant prices of prescription drugs and mounting health insurance paperwork to malpractice lawsuits and dependence on expensive medical technologies is driving health-care costs through the roof. I believe the huge financial drain will force us to rethink the very nature of medicine. Right now, Western medicine is geared toward *treating illness*, not toward *promoting health and healing* with preventive lifestyle counseling and simpler, more natural remedies. It's more a disease-management than a health-care system. Health insurance doesn't usually cover preventive services, like learning how to cook healthy meals or setting up a fitness program. And research funding to study alternative treatments is still meager. In my opinion, the economic crisis in health care will be the driving force behind the mainstreaming of integrative medicine as it becomes more and more apparent that this system can be effective at cutting costs while maintaining or improving patient outcomes.

In October, I'll begin my book tour to share my newest ideas from *Healthy Aging* (Knopf, 2005). I'd enjoy meeting *Self Healing* readers along the way, so check the enclosed brochure or the newsletter's website for a complete tour listing. Some events are free; others have an admission fee. Contact your nearest location to find out more.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

Dr. Andrew Weil's

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A Neat Way to Lose Weight

Small changes in the amount of movement you make every day can lead to big rewards when it comes to weight loss. That's the idea behind non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT), a fancy term for the energy used for everything you do that doesn't involve sleeping, eating, or sports-like exercise. Examples of NEAT include tapping your toes, fidgeting, standing, or other ways of using up energy. This is different from the exercise that you do at the gym. What might seem like small movements can burn up to 350 calories a day. That's enough for overweight people to lose 30 to 40 pounds over the course of a year.

I'm intrigued by a recent study—the first of its kind—on NEAT, in which researchers at the Mayo Clinic studied the links between inactivity and obesity in 10 obese and 10 lean people. After monitoring each individual's movements for 10 days, the researchers then overfed the lean and underfed the obese participants by 1,000 calories a day while continuing to monitor their movements. The lean people still tended to stand, walk, and fidget more than their heavier counterparts (*Science*, January 28, 2005). The researchers suspect that the tendency for overweight

people to move less could be genetic, predisposing them toward sedentary behavior.

To reap the benefits of NEAT, my suggestion is for everyone to move more—and sit less—during the day, especially people who want to shed some pounds and those with sedentary jobs or lives. (This should be done *in addition to* a regular exercise program and a healthy diet.) James Levine, MD, the Mayo Clinic researcher who led the study, says that his findings have caused him to transform his own workspace to allow him to do more NEAT: His computer now sits in front of a treadmill on which he walks at a leisurely pace while working (less than 1 mile per hour). In addition, he conducts meetings while walking instead of sitting down.

Your own changes don't have to be this extreme. You can burn extra calories by consciously making more small movements throughout the day. Pace around while on the telephone, stand instead of sit, tap your toes, and get up from your desk frequently. At home, you can wash the car by hand, chop vegetables instead of using the food processor, and do yard work and home repair yourself rather than hiring help. ☎

Dairy Dilemmas: Is Milk a Must?

A glass of milk pairs up nicely with cookies, supposedly “does a body good,” and can produce a milk mustache, even if you’re not a celebrity. But some physicians and nutritionists disagree with the National Dairy Council’s campaign that we all need to get milk. People like Walter Willett, MD, who chairs the nutrition department at the Harvard School of Public Health, and myself have soured on milk drinking. Neither of us believes there was good scientific evidence to support the recent boost in the US Dietary Guidelines and Food Guide Pyramid from two to three servings of milk and milk products a day for adults. Below are six reasons why Dr. Willett and I believe that drinking milk is not a daily requirement for optimum health or a necessity to meet your calcium and protein needs.

1 Unusual beyond weaning. Humans are the only mammals who drink milk beyond the time of infancy. (Animals might also find it strange that we typically drink the milk of another species—a cow.) Perhaps it’s not in the order of nature for an adult to consume milk.

2 Large numbers of lactose intolerant. After drinking milk or eating products made with it, many people develop the stomach cramps, bloating, and diarrhea caused by lactose intolerance. Recently, a Cornell University biologist studied why certain populations stop producing lactase, the enzyme needed to break down milk sugar. He found that many people who have trouble digesting milk have ancestors who came from very hot or cold climates in Asia and Africa, where financial or safety reasons made raising cattle difficult. Meanwhile, those of European heritage lived in areas where the dairy industry thrived, and they appear to have passed on gene mutations that helped people maintain the ability to produce lactase into adulthood. His research might explain why only about 25 percent of the world’s adult population can easily digest milk. Supermarkets often sell lactose-reduced and lactose-free milk, and lactose-intolerant people may have no problem with fermented dairy products like yogurt, some hard cheeses, and nondairy “milks” made from soybeans, rice, or almonds.

3 Dairy-disease links. I’ve noticed that my patients who have allergies, eczema, asthma, chronic bronchitis, and autoimmune diseases say they have fewer symptoms when they eliminate cow’s milk from their diet, possibly because casein, milk’s main protein, irritates the immune system. Dr. Willett tells me studies suggest that diets high in dairy products have been most strongly linked with an increased risk of developing prostate cancer.

The connection between dairy and ovarian cancer has been inconclusive, and the data also seem mixed for breast cancer. In recent research, Dr. Willett and his colleagues found that teenage girls who drank more whole and skim milk had a slightly higher risk of acne. Still, calcium has its benefits: Studies have linked milk drinking in men with a

lower risk of diabetes, and higher calcium intakes may also reduce hypertension or colon cancer risk.

The dairy industry has long maintained that milk products help protect against osteoporosis. But Dr. Willett says the body of scientific evidence does not support the idea that getting more calcium helps prevent fractures in the long run or make you less likely to break a bone. He further argues that most of the world’s population consumes few or no dairy products and has much lower fracture rates than the United States, and that scientists’ conclusions about calcium intake and osteoporosis risk have been drawn from bone-density studies, which reveal thinning bone, rather than the actual occurrence of fractures. Other lifestyle factors likely contribute to poor bone health, from too much dietary protein (especially animal) and too little exercise to a failure to use calcium properly due to a lack of vitamins D and K.

4 Not a weight-loss aid. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), a Washington-based health organization that advocates a plant-based diet, filed two lawsuits against the dairy industry in June to stop a “massive, deceptive advertising campaign” that consuming more dairy products can help people lose weight. PCRM says there is overwhelming scientific evidence that dairy products encourage weight gain or have no effect on it; meanwhile, the industry claims studies have found that dairy products can help you shed pounds and lose body fat. PCRM counters that all but two of some 35 clinical trials have found no relationship between consuming dairy products or calcium supplements and body weight. Those two—which were funded by the dairy industry and done by the same researcher—were small, short-term studies. They found a weak correlation between milk drinking and weight loss when people also reduced daily calories, which is not the same as showing that milk promotes weight loss. Another explanation is that drinking milk replaces other unhealthy foods such as soda.

5 Nutritional concerns. I’ve previously written (in the January 2005 issue) about my concerns with the antibiotics and hormones found in cow’s milk that’s not organic. I worry that the growth hormones given to cows to boost milk production and even the natural hormones made during lactation may be contributing to the rise in hormonally driven cancers in humans. In addition, cow’s milk is high in saturated fat, which has been linked with cardiovascular disease and obesity. Low- or nonfat milk and products made from them offer fewer calories and less fat.

6 Alternative calcium sources. It’s possible to get enough calcium without drinking milk, by eating calcium-rich foods or taking a daily supplement along with vitamin D, which helps the body use and absorb the mineral. Nondairy sources include kale, collards, spinach, broccoli, beans, sardines and canned salmon with bones, and calcium-fortified soy milk, orange juice, tofu, and cereals. 

fast fact

Some 30 to 50 million Americans are lactose intolerant, including up to 75 percent of African Americans.

An Integrative Prostate Cancer Treatment Plan

It's been said that prostate cancer is the only human cancer that's curable but doesn't commonly *need* to be cured. There's some truth to that: The majority of older men who have it will die of something else before it ever becomes a problem. Still, prostate cancer is the second most common malignancy in American men, and the second leading cause of male cancer deaths. If you've been diagnosed with the disease, you'll want to do all you can to stay healthy. Fortunately, there are several options, from conventional treatments to promising lifestyle measures, that can cure prostate cancer, slow its progression, or keep it from recurring. I believe that a mix of these approaches may be most effective.

A man may not give much thought to his prostate until a diagnosis of cancer forces him to. But this walnut-sized gland that surrounds the urethra and produces prostatic fluid (a component of semen) can harbor malignant cells. The exact causes of prostate cancer are unclear, but your risk increases after age 50. African Americans and men who have a father or brother with the disease are also at higher risk. Other factors, like a high-fat diet, may play a role as well. Because prostate cancer is often caught early with the help of screening tests (see the box below) and typically spreads slowly, most men don't develop any symptoms.

You may wonder why you need any treatment at all—and in fact, some men don't. They may choose an approach called watchful waiting, in which a doctor monitors the cancer with blood tests and physical exams every six months. No treatment is given unless the cancer grows or symptoms develop. Watchful waiting is usually a good choice for men in their 70s or older, for whom the benefits of surgery or radiation may not outweigh the side effects and other risks of these conventional treatments.

Should You Get Tested?

Since the 1990s, men and their doctors have relied on the prostate specific antigen (PSA) test to help identify prostate cancer risk. Now, a recent study suggests PSA may not be as accurate as once believed. While a PSA score greater than 2.5 is often recommended as the cutoff point after which a biopsy may be warranted, researchers say a cutoff of 2.6 would catch only about 40 percent of prostate cancers (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, July 6, 2005). Yet, lowering that cutoff score would cause many men to needlessly undergo uncomfortable biopsies.

For men aged 50 and over, I recommend talking with your doctor about the benefits and risks of PSA testing so you can make an informed decision. Men in high-risk groups, like African Americans and men with a strong family history of prostate cancer, should talk with their doctors about being tested at a younger age.

But watchful waiting isn't for everyone. Most experts recommend that younger men and those with faster-growing cancers err on the side of caution and have cancerous cells removed. The two most common methods are surgery, in which the entire prostate is removed, and radiation therapy, in which cancerous cells are destroyed but the gland is left intact. Both approaches have similar cure rates—nearly 100 percent after five years. But both can also have unpleasant side effects, including urinary incontinence and impotence.

Choosing which approach is right for you is a decision that you need to make with your physician. There's no “one size fits all” method: You and your doctor will need to consider various factors, including your age, the stage of the cancer, any other health problems you have, and the risks of each approach. You may be able to decrease your chance of side effects by choosing doctors who have performed at least 150 surgeries or radiologists with high success rates. For more on selecting a treatment, visit prostatecancerfoundation.org.

Useful Natural Approaches

Whether you opt to treat your cancer with surgery, radiation, or nothing at all, the natural measures below may improve your odds of recovery. I recommend using them in conjunction with conventional treatment (or watchful waiting).

Lifestyle. In a recent study, eating a very-low-fat (less than 10 percent of calories) vegan diet rich in produce and whole grains, getting moderate aerobic exercise, practicing relaxation techniques like yoga and meditation, and attending support groups lowered PSA levels in men with prostate cancer, possibly inhibiting cancer growth. (PSA or prostate specific antigen is a marker of the disease that can be measured in the blood.) Men who didn't make the lifestyle changes saw their PSA levels rise over one year (*Journal of Urology*, September 2005). The study's author, Dean Ornish, MD—who has previously shown these measures to help reverse atherosclerosis—believes that no one lifestyle change is responsible and that the program is most effective as a whole. To learn more about Dr. Ornish's program, visit pmri.org.

Nutrition. Some foods and compounds appear to slow or halt the progression of prostate cancer, including soy, green and black tea, pomegranate juice, fiber, and lycopene (best absorbed from cooked tomatoes). Conversely, diets high in saturated fats (in red meat, dairy, and other animal products) can raise prostate cancer risk. More research is needed, but for now I'd advise that men eat less unhealthy fat and add more of these beneficial foods to the diet. For more on nutrition and prostate cancer, visit prostatecancerfoundation.org.

Herbs. In one preliminary study, a combination product containing ginger, turmeric, and other herbs decreased the growth of—and helped destroy—prostate cancer cells in the lab, perhaps by reducing inflammation. A human study is under way, but I think it's safe for men with prostate cancer to take herbal-based anti-inflammatories that contain ginger, turmeric, and holy basil; follow package directions. 

Stress and Your Digestion

If you've ever felt butterflies in your stomach before giving a speech or had diarrhea before an exam, you know that anxiety can have a powerful effect on your gastrointestinal (GI) system. And people in extremely stressful or terrifying situations—such as convicts awaiting execution or soldiers on the battlefield—are prone to soil themselves. That's not surprising: I've long said that the GI tract, like the skin, is one of the areas of the body where stress expresses itself most, due to its high ratio of nerves to body tissue. Stress and anxiety may have immediate effects like diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting, and can aggravate chronic conditions such as gastroesophageal reflux disease, ulcers, and inflammatory bowel disease.

Negative emotions can also play an ongoing role in digestive problems like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and functional dyspepsia (FD). Known as functional gastrointestinal disorders or FGIDs, these conditions appear to involve a disturbance in the GI tract's ability to do its job properly. People with IBS have chronic diarrhea, constipation, bloating, gas, or a mix of these symptoms, while those with FD typically suffer from heartburn, belching, and nausea. FGIDs have no known physical cause, but research suggests they may be strongly influenced by stress: Studies show that people with FGIDs also have higher rates of anxiety, depression, and difficult life events (such as financial or relationship problems). Many people with FGIDs find that their symptoms are worse during times of tension and clear up when they feel relaxed and happy. That does not mean these conditions are "all in your head"—only that your brain can affect your gut.

The GI tract is lined with a network of nerve cells and fibers that is known as the enteric nervous system, which some researchers call the "second brain." The enteric nervous system helps the GI tract communicate with the brain and vice versa. But for reasons that are unclear, people with FGIDs have extra sensitivity of this system, causing it to overreact to the normal stimuli of the digestive process. This reaction can lead to pain, discomfort, and other symptoms. In FGIDs, the nerves in the brain and the gut may not communicate with each other as well as they should, leaving these people more sensitive to emotional stress and more apt to develop gastrointestinal difficulties.

Without question, emotions can affect the gut: Research shows that feelings like anger, resentment, and excitement can increase the movements within the GI tract, leading to diarrhea, while feeling depressed can reduce them, resulting in constipation. However, just as your emotions can cause or worsen GI difficulties, practicing mind-body techniques can take advantage of the brain-gut connection.

Stomach-Soothing Strategies

Some doctors prescribe antidepressants to help treat FGIDs, presumably because these medications can improve mood (and therefore possibly GI symptoms) and ease physical pain. They may work for some people, but I believe that natural

Taming Tummy Aches in Kids

Up to 20 percent of school-aged children have recurrent abdominal pain (RAP). Although unhealthy eating habits can have an effect, RAP typically has no physical cause and is most likely an expression of stress: Tummy troubles tend to flare up when there are problems at school or home. Fortunately, mind-body measures—which kids are usually very open to—can help. In a pilot study at the University of Arizona, children who were taught guided imagery and breathing techniques and practiced them at home for two months saw their average number of days of stomach pain fall by 67 percent (*Clinical Pediatrics*, July/August 2003). Other kids may benefit from self-hypnosis, biofeedback, or progressive muscle relaxation. Kids with RAP may be more likely to develop functional gastrointestinal disorders as adults.

treatments like mind-body measures—which get at the root of FGIDs—are a better choice. I recommend breathing exercises, such as the Relaxing Breath described in my books and recordings, to anyone who finds that stress worsens GI problems. Plus, consider trying one or more of the mind-body techniques below for specific FGIDs. Although not as well studied for these conditions, biofeedback, guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), and journaling may also help. In addition, eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and exercising regularly all can relieve stress.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy. This treatment involves working with a therapist to identify and change unhealthy thoughts and behaviors. Research shows that cognitive-behavioral therapy can improve symptoms in people with IBS and FD, possibly by reducing mental causes of stress and teaching patients how to better cope with their conditions. (For therapist referrals, visit nacht.org.) Other types of talk therapy have also been shown to relieve FD.

Hypnosis. A number of studies have shown this trance-inducing technique helps ease FGIDs. For example, a study of 126 FD patients found that those who got regular hypnotherapy sessions for 16 weeks had fewer symptoms of dyspepsia and needed less medication than those who didn't (*Gastroenterology*, December 2002). And a recent review of 14 studies found that hypnosis improves symptoms of IBS (*American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, January 2005). Working with a practitioner seems to be most effective, but research suggests that using a hypnotherapy recording can also help alleviate IBS. To find a practitioner, visit asch.net. Or you can try Dr. Steven Gurgevich's hypnosis CD *Irritable Bowel Syndrome* (to order, call 866-506-1700 or visit tranceformation.com).

Relaxation Response. In a small study, researchers found that people with IBS who practiced a type of stress reduction called the Relaxation Response for 15 minutes twice a day for six weeks had improvements in symptoms like gas, bloating, and diarrhea (*Behaviour Research and Therapy*, July 2001). This state of deep relaxation can be accessed through breathing techniques, meditation, PMR, or by following the directions found at mbmi.org/pages/mbb_rr2.asp. 

What is your opinion of an antioxidant supplement called Protandim?

I'm skeptical. This supplement, which contains five plant ingredients including green tea, turmeric, milk thistle, bacopa extract, and ashwagandha, is said to help promote a "healthy life expectancy." Manufacturers suggest that it be taken not to reverse signs of aging or prolong lifespan, but to increase energy and reduce the risk of age-related diseases such as Parkinson's disease and cancer. Compared to other "anti-aging supplements," Protandim supposedly doesn't just supply your body with additional antioxidants, but also increases your body's ability to produce more of the antioxidants that it naturally makes.

The evidence for Protandim's effectiveness appears to be based mainly on animal studies and small human trials, all unpublished. While I've advised using many of the ingredi-

ents in Protandim as isolated supplements for specific health concerns, I'd want to see more published clinical studies on this combination product before recommending it.

My two-year-old granddaughter has cystic fibrosis. What integrative approaches would you recommend for her?

John Mark, MD, a pediatric lung specialist at Stanford University and graduate Fellow of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine, tells me that cases vary from mild to very sick in cystic fibrosis (CF), an inherited condition in which a defective gene causes mucus and sweat to become thick and sticky, which often leads to lung problems. There can also be problems with the digestive juices, causing malabsorption and slow growth. He would need more information about your granddaughter's health problems to know where she fell on the CF spectrum.

The Importance of Family Mealtimes

Family dinners were once a time-honored tradition, but in many 21st century households, sharing the family table seems to have fallen by the wayside. Thirty to forty percent of families say they don't eat together on most nights. The reasons are many, from hectic schedules and after-school activities to late nights at work and dual-career couples too pooped to cook. Interestingly, most teens say they enjoy eating meals with their families, and recent research has suggested many compelling reasons to make it a higher priority.

The benefits. I think that family dinners are an important aspect of culture in all times and places. When parents make dinner themselves, they probably pay more attention to choosing healthy ingredients and providing a balanced meal. A study done as part of Project EAT (Eating Among Teens) showed that having dinner together lowers the odds of adolescent females having poor self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, or eating disorders. Experts suggest that this is a result of the parents being able to monitor their children's eating

behavior and keeping up to date on their social activities.

Socializing at mealtime strengthens family bonds as well as allowing the parents to be positive role models for healthy eating. Teenagers of both sexes have a decreased chance of having poor grades and cigarette, alcohol, and substance abuse problems, because conversations during mealtime can help identify problems before they start. Family dinners tend to increase children's intake of fruits and vegetables and decrease their consumption of fried food, saturated fat, and soda, making them healthier overall. They may also help improve vocabulary in younger children. To reap these benefits, experts suggest that families aim for six to seven dinners together per week. But even a few nights of family togetherness and connection can make a difference.

Making meals happen. I encourage all families and couples to make time in their busy lives to enjoy some regular meals together. If it can't be a nightly occurrence, make it happen as often as possible. If having dinner together is difficult, choose another time like breakfast, an after-dinner

snack, or a weekend brunch. The focus does not have to be on elaborate, labor-intensive feasts. Even the simplest meal can provide physical and emotional nourishment, when it's shared. Preparing a meal together can add to family time and teach your children valuable lessons about cooking and good nutrition—two skills that are key to a healthy lifestyle.

In *Barbarians at the Plate* (Perigee, 2005), author Marialisa Calta champions the family meal and provides innovative ways for parents to prepare healthy, home-cooked ones. The book lists items to stock in your pantry, gives suggestions on making the most out of your trip to the grocery store, and has many quick recipes. But it's more than the food itself that makes the family meal important; it's being together and the conversations that take place, suggests Miriam Weinstein in *The Surprising Power of Family Meals* (Steerforth, 2005). Family Day is celebrated every year on the fourth Monday in September. Make a date to share a meal with your family on September 26 and consider other creative ways to make this happen on a more regular basis. **SP**

Nutrition is the most important aspect of her treatment, says Dr. Mark, and when children with CF reach the 50th percentile on height and weight charts, they develop fewer lung problems. To achieve normal growth, your granddaughter needs to get calories from nutritious foods and good fats that help reduce lung inflammation, mainly monounsaturated ones like olive oil. By including some meat in her diet, she can get taurine, an amino acid that some research has found can improve fat digestion in people with CF. Her doctor will prescribe her multivitamins to prevent nutrient deficiencies and pancreatic enzymes to aid digestion. Being active, which most toddlers are, helps strengthen muscles in her airways. When she's five or older, Dr. Mark suggests guided imagery or listening to music to relax children when they're short of breath, as well as learning breathing exercises (alone or as part of the martial arts) to help improve lung function. Older children can also try massage or osteopathic manipulation to open up airflow and daily fish-oil supplements with 2 to 3 grams of EPA to preserve lung function. If your granddaughter uses these integrative approaches, she should not drop or substitute them for her conventional medications, but she might get sick less frequently and rely on antibiotics less.

Can I safely take vitamins past their expiration date?

Taking vitamins and minerals past their expiration date will not harm you, but they may not be as beneficial as they should be. After the expiration date, vitamins may lose their potency and no longer meet their stated nutrient content (the "% Daily Value") indicated on the bottle. All vitamins have different shelf lives and some expire faster than others, especially in hot, humid climates. I would pay attention to the expiration date stamped on the bottle, just as you would with a prescription medication or food. Although the Food and Drug Administration doesn't yet require expiration dates on vitamins, I would look for brands that use them.

I've heard that people with diabetes shouldn't take fish-oil supplements. Is this true?

Although it is unclear why, some studies do suggest that fish-oil supplements may raise LDL ("bad") cholesterol and increase glucose levels in people with type 2 diabetes. Yet, other studies show the opposite effects. And still other research has found that the omega-3 fatty acids in fish and fish oil may protect both diabetics and people who don't have diabetes against many health problems, including cardiovascular disease. Since one serious complication of diabetes is heart disease, I think the benefits of including fish oil outweigh any potential risks. I recommend that people with either type 1 or type 2 diabetes eat several weekly servings of oily fish like wild Alaskan salmon and other foods high in omega-3s like walnuts and ground flax seeds. I also think it's safe for people with diabetes to take fish-oil supplements containing 1,000 mg of combined EPA and DHA daily. 

Acupuncture Eases Bladder Woes. An ancient needling technique may offer new hope for overactive bladder. A study of 85 middle-aged women with the condition found that those who received four weekly acupuncture sessions made fewer daily bathroom visits, felt less of an urgent need to urinate, and had fewer problems with leakage and a better quality of life compared to women who received a sham acupuncture treatment designed simply for relaxation. The researchers say the benefits from acupuncture were similar to those of drug treatment or behavioral techniques. (*Obstetrics & Gynecology*, July 2005)

Comment: Scientists think acupuncture may work by decreasing nerve stimulation to the bladder, which can help relax the muscles there. It's not yet known how long-lasting acupuncture's effects may be, but it can also be paired with behavioral therapy (like relaxation methods and bladder training) and is worth a try.

Logging On Lessens Depression. If you're feeling down, help might be a computer screen away. In a study of roughly 200 older adults presented at the American Psychological Association's annual convention in August, computer users reported slightly fewer depressive symptoms than those who did not log on. Researchers suspect computer use improves mood by making older people feel more connected with the world and others around them, and by helping them to learn new things.

Comment: I think it's interesting to observe how new technology can influence our health and happiness. Older adults who have access to email and the Internet can feel more emotionally connected and intellectually engaged as well as less isolated socially. Finding meaningful activities that enrich your life and exercise your mind are key steps to healthy aging.

Produce for Healthier Joints. Certain carotenoid compounds in some yellow and orange fruits and vegetables may help reduce the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis. Researchers analyzed diet histories of more than 25,000 people over a nine-year period and found the average daily intake of two carotenoids (beta-cryptoxanthin and zeaxanthin) were 40 and 20 percent lower, respectively, in those with arthritis than in people with healthier joints. But two better-known carotenoids, lycopene and lutein, didn't seem to have the same arthritis-protective effects. (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, August 2005)

Comment: Carotenoids and other antioxidant compounds found in produce may help neutralize the free radicals thought to cause the joint inflammation of rheumatoid arthritis. Eat five to nine daily servings of produce from all parts of the color spectrum. 

Biofeedback's Benefits

You might not imagine that being hooked up to a machine can be relaxing and fun, but that is true of biofeedback. This mind-body therapy gets its name from using electronic monitoring equipment to measure *biological* functions that may not ordinarily be under conscious control and then *feeding this information back* so the patient can learn to regulate them. For instance, you can learn to influence your blood pressure, heart rate, or skin temperature to promote relaxation or ease stress-related health conditions.

I'll give an example of how it works: A practitioner may attach temperature sensors to your fingers, and your skin temperature may be converted to an audible signal like a beep; the faster the beeps, the higher the skin temperature. (Some biofeedback devices use visual cues instead, such as flashing lights or patterns on a computer screen, to indicate various biological functions.) Your job is to make the beeps go faster by raising your skin temperature. To do this, you have to relax your sympathetic nervous system, which controls the body's fight-or-flight response. Although you probably don't know how to do this, you'll quickly discover that you can make the beeps go faster, which reflects improved sympathetic tone. Over several sessions, you'll get better and better at it. In this way, biofeedback can teach you what it feels like to be relaxed internally, so that you can recreate this sense of calm in your everyday life.

Besides relaxation, biofeedback has shown benefits for a wide array of health concerns described below. A typical biofeedback training program consists of 10 hour-long sessions, often spaced a week apart, although EEG (electroencephalograph) biofeedback—in which you learn to alter your brain wave patterns—often involves 20 or more sessions.

ADHD. Children and adults with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may benefit from EEG biofeedback by learning to increase beta brain waves associated with alertness and decrease theta waves associated with a dreamy state of mind. Studies show that some 75 percent of ADHD patients improve with EEG biofeedback. Yet, treatment may involve 30 to 50 sessions and is often not covered by health insurance.

Asthma. A recent study found that a type of biofeedback training that increases heart rate variability (HRV) can help people with asthma. Increased HRV is associated with a better ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and HRV tends to decrease during periods of stress. In the study, adults with asthma who were trained in HRV biofeedback reduced their use of inhaled steroids and also showed improvements in the severity of their asthma (*Chest*, August 2004).

Headaches and jaw pain. Biofeedback is now widely accepted as a migraine treatment. Migraine sufferers can often nip an attack in the bud by learning to increase their skin temperature, which is a measure of blood flow into the hands. Increased circulation to the hands diverts excess blood flow from the head, alleviating the headaches. Biofeedback techniques that work on muscle tension can help tension headaches, temporomandibular disorders (once known as TMJ syndrome), and bruxism (nighttime teeth grinding).

Hypertension. There's ample evidence that biofeedback can benefit people with high blood pressure. An analysis of 22 studies found that it reduced systolic blood pressure (the first number in a reading) by an average of more than 7 points and diastolic blood pressure by about 6 points (*Hypertension Research*, January 2003). Biofeedback can also ease "white-coat" hypertension, blood pressure that rises in medical situations, like in a doctor's office.

Incontinence. Medicare now covers biofeedback training for urinary incontinence in women and men, plus it can help both fecal incontinence and chronic constipation. Biofeedback, often done in combination with Kegel exercises, can help you learn to contract and control your bladder and bowel muscles. It can also teach you to relax the appropriate muscles to alleviate constipation.

I often recommend biofeedback to people with cardiac arrhythmias, irritable bowel syndrome, and Raynaud's disease, all ailments with a prominent stress component. I would consider EEG biofeedback for neurological problems such as epilepsy, head injuries, narcolepsy, and stroke rehabilitation. Plus, this form of biofeedback has shown promise for mental health problems such as addictions, anxiety disorders (including post-traumatic stress disorder), and depression.

To find a biofeedback practitioner, visit bcia.org. For more information on biofeedback's health benefits, visit aapb.org.

A Game that Teaches Relaxation

I recently tried a biofeedback-based computer game called *The Journey to Wild Divine* that might benefit any adult who would like some help learning to relax. Available as a CD-ROM for Macs and PCs, the game comes with sensors that are worn like rings on three fingers to monitor skin conductance levels (which are affected by sweating) and heart rate variability. To play the game, which depicts a journey through a mythical realm, you must alter your physical state. For instance, you can light a virtual fire only by becoming more relaxed, or open a door by raising your energy levels. The graphics look much better than those in the do-it-yourself biofeedback devices I've previously seen. For more on the game, which costs about \$150, visit wilddivine.com. **SP**

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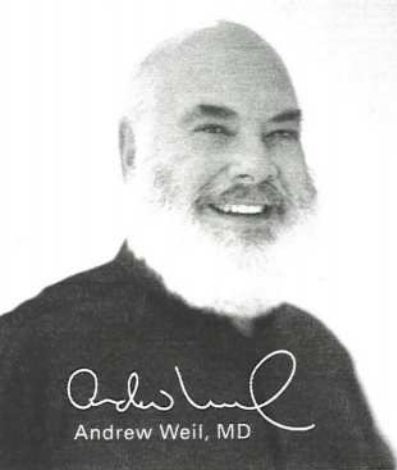
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NOVEMBER 2005

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

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ON MY MIND:

Krill Oil

I recently learned about a promising source of omega-3 fatty acids called krill oil.

What it is. Extracted from Antarctic krill, a tiny shrimp-like crustacean, krill oil contains the omega-3s EPA and DHA as well as natural antioxidant pigments. The oil's chemical structure may allow its omega-3s to be more readily absorbed than those in fish oil. And krill oil is absorbed in the small intestine rather than in the stomach, so you don't burp up a fishy taste from it.

The evidence. Early studies suggest krill oil may be more effective than fish oil at lowering LDL ("bad") cholesterol and triglyceride levels and at reducing PMS symptoms. Other research suggests it can ease joint pain in some arthritis patients.

Bottom line. As research continues, you might look for omega-3 supplements containing Neptune Krill Oil (NKO), the form used in studies. 

Seven Strategies for Sinus Relief

Research has found that people with chronic sinusitis scored worse on quality-of-life surveys and reported more pain than those with heart disease, lung problems, and back pain. Clearly, people feel miserable when there's inflammation in the sinuses, the four pairs of bony cavities found behind the nose, cheeks, and forehead. Anything that blocks the flow in these moist air spaces causes mucus to back up in the nose. This creates a perfect breeding ground for viruses, bacteria, and fungi. When the nasal membranes swell and sinus pressure builds, infections can occur. While it's unlikely that chronic sinus problems have a single cause, one recent study suggests some infections may be linked with an exaggerated immune response to common airborne fungi. Allergist Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, the medical director of the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine, joins me to describe the best natural strategies for sinus relief.

Clean your nose. If you're prone to sinus infections, nasal irrigation is a must-do practice to prevent them: Flush your nasal passages with a stream of saltwater once or twice a day to wash away mucus and irritants. The simplest ways are to use a neti pot (a spouted device with a handle), bulb syringe, or a specially designed squeeze bottle. Mix a quarter-teaspoon of salt with one cup of warm water. Lean over a sink, tilt your head, and let the solution stream into one nostril with enough force so that it flows out the other. Repeat on the opposite side, then gently blow your nose. Nasal rinsing might sting or feel weird at first, but it's my top recommendation for sinus health, and studies show that people who do this technique regularly have fewer symptoms and use less medication.

Get steamed. Bring a pot of water to boil on the stove, lower the heat to simmer, and add a drop of eucalyptus or thyme oil, both of which have antibacterial properties. Then stand over the pot with a towel draped over your head (keep the towel away from any

flame) and breathe in the steam for 10 to 15 minutes. Do this two to four times a day to soothe inflamed sinuses and ease congestion.

Seek warmth. At the first sign of a sinus infection, place a hot washcloth over your nose, cheekbones, and eyes for 10 minutes or more. (Reheat it as necessary.) This home remedy breaks up congestion and improves mucus drainage, while taking the edge off sinus pain. By the way, acupuncture may also ease sinus pain and promote drainage.

Bring your own humidifier. Since dryness irritates sinuses, Dr. Horwitz suggests using saline nasal spray. A squirt or two in each nostril works like a portable humidifier, misting and healing nasal passageways so that you'll breathe easier.

Change your diet. Milk and wheat are the two most common foods that cause allergic reactions and boost mucus production. Read labels carefully and cut out one of these foods at a time for four to eight weeks to see how your symptoms respond. Eat fewer animal foods and less saturated and trans fat, all of which promote inflammation. Instead, include more plant protein, omega-3-rich fish, fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and the anti-inflammatory herbs ginger and turmeric. And drink lots of water to thin mucus.

Control your allergies. A sinus infection can be triggered by a close encounter with common allergens like dust, pollen, pet dander, mold, or fungi. Reduce your exposure to these irritants by installing a HEPA filter to clean the air in your bedroom. A humidifier can moisten indoor air to ease congestion, but clean it regularly. Otherwise, it may do more harm than good. Avoid strong chemical odors, smoke from tobacco and fireplaces, and other air pollutants. These can all swell sinus membranes, as can drinking alcohol.

Boost immunity. For year-round prevention, the Chinese herb astragalus is safe to take every day as an immune-boosting tonic. The same goes for extracts of medicinal mushrooms. 

The concept of anti-aging medicine is such a powerful and tempting one that it's a multi-billion-dollar industry. But to my mind, it represents an attempt to deny or prevent the process of aging. I view this as counterproductive—a failure to understand and accept an important aspect of our experience. And this attitude can be a major obstacle to aging gracefully.

Although it might not be a popular opinion, I make it clear in my new book *Healthy Aging* (Knopf, 2005) that I don't believe in trying to stop the clock or reverse the aging process. I am more interested in having doctors and patients do everything they can to promote longer, more active, and more comfortable lives by reducing the risks and delaying the onset of age-related diseases. In scientific terms, this is known as "compression of morbidity." It means that you want to live as long and as well as possible, then squeeze the time of illness and decline at the end of life into the shortest period possible. The goal is to compress the amount of time that people spend sick and suffering, giving them more active years and sparing society the costs of maintaining so many chronically ill old people.

I believe that obsession with life extension and anti-aging medicine is an obstacle to aging well. The key to successful aging is good health. To age gracefully, you let nature take its course but do everything you can to protect yourself from the diseases that become more likely as you get older. From eating a wholesome diet and getting regular physical activity to maintaining social and intellectual connections and taking the right kinds of supplements (see the Vitamin Advisor on drweil.com), that's my lifelong prescription for healthy aging.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

Dr. Andrew Weil's

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Connecting Kids with Nature

"I like to play indoors better," says one child. "That's where all the electrical outlets are." Such comments are all too common today, argues child advocate Richard Louv in his new book, *Last Child in the Woods* (Algonquin, 2005). He worries that creative outdoor play has been displaced by hours spent in front of a computer or TV set, leading to what he calls nature-deficit disorder. Unlike attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, "NDD" isn't a medical diagnosis, but instead describes what Louv views as the effects of a lack of nature on kids, including increased stress and feelings of not being rooted in the world, as well as trouble paying attention.

I think that label is fine if it encourages people to get outside more. Being outdoors is both relaxing and energizing because it typically involves getting exercise and being exposed to fresh air, natural light, and sounds of nature (like chirping birds and running water). Plus, research suggests that exposure to nature may actually improve conditions like ADHD. Here are some ways for youngsters to reap such benefits.

Unstructured play. When children get outside, it's often to play organized sports,

which are certainly worthwhile. But unstructured outdoor play is valuable, too, since it encourages creativity. Remember playing outside as a kid? You didn't need toys—you created your own games, whether cops and robbers or digging to China. Try to encourage today's kids to do the same.

Safe spaces. Reports of "stranger danger" have made parents reluctant to let kids play outside. But such risks—while scary—are rare. Finding safe places to play may even be beneficial: Louv suggests that nature accentuates the senses so that "children with generous exposure to nature . . . may be more likely to develop the psychological survival skills that will help them detect real danger," whether confronted by a growling animal or a suspicious stranger.

Different options. Not every child has access to fields, forests, lakes, or oceans, but all can enjoy outdoor play and develop an appreciation for the natural world. Growing up in a row house in Philadelphia, I was exposed to nature through local parks and our small backyard garden. Parents should do their best to seek out "greenspace" for their kids, no matter where they live. ☞

Organic Foods: Why They're Worth the Extra Cost

A decade ago, many supermarkets didn't carry organic foods, or stocked little beyond some wilted lettuce and a basket of spotted apples. Today, you can find an assortment of organic produce at most stores, along with organic milk and other products. In fact, half of the organic food produced in the United States is now sold in large supermarkets, while health food chains like Whole Foods and Wild Oats account for only about 20 percent of organic food sales. Meanwhile, organic fare is increasingly showing up on restaurant menus, in college dining halls, and even at sports arenas.

As a longtime proponent of organic agriculture, I'm glad that organic foods are going mainstream. Rising consumer demand should lead to lower prices, but for now, organic foods typically cost more than conventional items because the supply is limited and the production and labor costs are higher. I think organic foods are worth the extra expense, and want to tell you when it's most important to choose them.

What "organic" means. In 2001, the US Department of Agriculture established national standards for organic foods. Such foods are produced without the use of most conventional pesticides and without synthetic fertilizers. In addition, these foods have not been genetically modified, irradiated to kill bacteria, or fertilized with sewage sludge from waste treatment plants. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given organic feed and no antibiotics or growth hormones. (There are no organic standards for fish.) Food products cannot use the "USDA Organic" seal unless at least 95 percent of their ingredients are organic.

Why choose organic? For me, the three most important reasons to choose organic foods are that they're safer, better for the environment, and probably more nutritious. An added bonus is that organic foods often taste better.

- **Safer.** Switching to organic foods gave 23 Seattle-area children "dramatic and immediate" protection from two pesticides widely used in conventional agriculture, according to recent research. Concentrations of the pesticides fell greatly in the elementary school-age children during a *five-day period* when organic foods were substituted for conventional foods. Pesticide residues might harm children's developing nervous systems, and I worry that chronic, low-level exposure to environmental toxins (in our food, water, and air) may increase the risk of cancer and degenerative neurological disorders such as Parkinson's disease and ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease).

- **Better for the environment.** In a recent study, organic farming produced the same yields of corn and soybeans as conventional farming, but used 30 percent less energy, less water, and no toxic pesticides (*Bioscience*, July 2005).

- **More nutritious.** More research is needed, but there's some evidence that organic foods have better nutritional profiles. A report issued in January by the nonprofit Organic Center (organic-center.org) found that on average, antioxidant levels were about 30 percent higher in organic foods compared to conventional foods grown under the same conditions. Other

research shows organic catsup contains more than 50 percent higher levels of the carotenoid lycopene. Organically grown plants experience greater environmental stress (from insects, for example), so their innate defense mechanisms increase production of protective antioxidants.

Which foods to emphasize. Because it's often more costly to buy organic, you may want to prioritize. In general, I recommend choosing organic versions of foods that you eat most often. The prices of organic products tend to be highest at mainstream supermarkets, somewhat less at health food chains, and may be lowest if you join a food co-op, visit farmers' markets, or buy a share in a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program. Here's more advice.

- **Produce.** The nonprofit Environmental Working Group (ewg.org) periodically updates its list of the "dirty dozen"—the 12 fruits and vegetables that are most contaminated with pesticides. Currently, peaches, strawberries, and apples top the list, followed by spinach, nectarines, celery, pears, cherries, potatoes, bell peppers, red raspberries, and imported grapes. Seek out organic varieties of these types of produce. If you use the zest of citrus fruits in recipes, try to get organic oranges and lemons, because the peel is the part most likely to be contaminated. And because even organic produce may harbor bacteria, you should wash it before use.

- **Dairy products.** Dairy cows are routinely given growth hormones to boost milk production. I suspect that these hormones contribute to the rise in hormonally driven cancers (breast and prostate) in humans. Choose organic milk, especially if you have children who drink a lot of it. Also, look for organic versions of other dairy products such as cheese, ice cream, yogurt, and butter.

- **Beef, poultry, and eggs.** If you eat beef, try to get organic varieties. Unlike most cattle, organically raised animals do not receive growth hormones, and organic feeding practices carry virtually no risk of transmitting mad-cow disease. Also, choose organic turkey, chicken, and eggs when possible in order to minimize consumption of antibiotic residues that are found in conventional products.

- **Soy foods.** Some 80 percent of the soybeans grown in this country are now genetically modified. While recent research suggests GM soybeans and corn don't raise consumers' risks of allergic reactions, one study found that the isoflavone content of GM soybeans was 12 to 14 percent lower than non-GM varieties. So if you're eating soy foods to boost your isoflavone intake, you're better off choosing organic varieties.

Plus, I suggest using only organic, expeller-pressed canola oil, meaning that chemicals weren't used to extract the oil from rapeseed and pesticides weren't sprayed on the crops. If you drink wine, look for organic varieties; grapes tend to be heavily treated with pesticides. Organic wine also doesn't contain added sulfites, preservatives to which some people are sensitive. Grains tend to have lower pesticide residues than produce, but organic versions may have more fiber and higher levels of nutrients because they're less processed. 

Fibromyalgia: The Best Natural Approaches

Fibromyalgia (also called fibromyalgia syndrome, or FMS) can be frustrating for both patients and physicians. People with this chronic condition have widespread joint and muscle pain and multiple “tender points” (where slight pressure causes pain), and most patients also suffer from fatigue and sleep disturbances. While FMS is thought to involve abnormal pain processing in the central nervous system, the underlying cause is not known. Pain medications provide only limited relief for many with FMS, and doctors may feel they have little to offer these patients.

I’ve found natural approaches to be very helpful in managing FMS. Below are my main recommendations; some ideas come from Randy Horwitz, MD, PhD, medical director of our Program in Integrative Medicine, and Dan Muller, MD, PhD, a rheumatologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, both of whom use integrative treatment programs for FMS.

Slowly increase activity. While exercise may feel painful at first, a growing body of research shows that regular aerobic activity can actually reduce pain levels, boost mood, and improve daily functioning in FMS patients. Exercise can also enhance sleep. Choose a low-impact aerobic activity like walking, cycling on a stationary bike, or exercising in a warm pool. Start with just a few minutes of exercise a day, perhaps three times a week. Over several weeks, slowly build up to 30 minutes most days of the week. Also, consider practicing yoga, tai chi, or qigong to increase flexibility and promote relaxation.

Learn to relax. Stress can worsen FMS symptoms, so I encourage daily practice of a relaxation technique. Dr. Muller recommends mindfulness meditation, in which you bring moment-to-moment awareness to bodily sensations and thoughts. You’ll discover how to be more comfortable in the present, which can lessen your fear of future pain. Regular practice of mindfulness meditation has been shown to ease pain, improve sleep, and reduce depression in FMS patients. To purchase a recording I created with mindfulness meditation expert Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, called *Meditation for Optimum Health*, visit drweilselfhealing.com or call (888) 337-9345.

Other mind-body approaches that have shown promise for FMS are biofeedback, guided imagery, hypnotherapy, and journaling. You might look into Belleruth Naparstek’s guided-imagery recording on fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome (to order, visit healthjourneys.com or call 800-800-8661) or Dr. Steven Gurgevich’s self-hypnosis recording on fibromyalgia (visit tranceformation.com or call 866-506-1700).

Consider cognitive-behavioral therapy. FMS patients can feel helpless in the face of their pain, but cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) seeks to increase your belief in your abilities

to manage your symptoms and stresses. Studies show that CBT improved pain, fatigue, mood, and daily functioning in FMS patients. To find a therapist, visit nacbt.org or aabt.org.

Eat an anti-inflammatory diet. While FMS isn’t an inflammatory condition, eating an anti-inflammatory diet may still help reduce pain. Eliminate trans fats, limit saturated and polyunsaturated fats, and use extra-virgin olive oil as your main cooking oil. Increase your intake of omega-3 fatty acids (in salmon, sardines, ground flax, and walnuts). Limit high glycemic load carbohydrates, like foods made with flour and sugar. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. And regularly season dishes with ginger and turmeric, spices with anti-inflammatory properties. To see an anti-inflammatory diet pyramid I’ve developed, visit healthyaging.com.

Take supplements. I advise FMS patients to take several supplements. Due to its muscle-relaxing properties, magnesium may help with FMS pain; take 500 to 750 mg a day, plus 1,000 to 1,500 mg of calcium to counter magnesium’s laxative effects. A daily antioxidant regimen (including vitamins C and E, selenium, and mixed carotenoids) promotes general health and may also reduce muscle cramping. B vitamins play a role in energy production and might lessen fatigue; take a daily B-50 B-complex supplement. Many FMS patients have low levels of vitamin D; take at least 1,000 IU daily. Plus, you may want to try supplemental omega-3s, ginger, or turmeric for their anti-inflammatory effects.

Other Approaches Worth Exploring

In addition to the above measures, I suggest experimenting with various natural therapies and seeing if they help you.

Acupuncture. Research on this technique is mixed. One recent study found acupuncture was no better than sham (fake) acupuncture at relieving FMS pain (*Annals of Internal Medicine*, July 5, 2005). But in a Mayo Clinic study presented at a scientific meeting in August, FMS patients who got six acupuncture sessions over two or three weeks had less pain, fatigue, and anxiety than those who got fake treatments.

Chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation. Preliminary research suggests that chiropractic care may improve range of motion and lessen pain in FMS patients, and there’s some evidence that osteopathic manipulation may ease FMS pain.

EMDR. Many people with FMS first developed symptoms after a physical or emotional trauma. These patients might benefit from eye movement desensitization and reproprocessing (EMDR), an unorthodox psychotherapeutic technique in which you recall a traumatic event while performing rapid

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eye movements. This supposedly helps the brain to “digest” the memory, reducing the emotional distress that’s associated with it. In one study, FMS patients who had just two sessions of EMDR experienced less anxiety, depression, and fatigue (*Complementary Therapies in Nursing & Midwifery*, November 2004). To find a practitioner, visit emdria.org or emdr.com.

Energy therapies. A study in which FMS patients had six sessions of Therapeutic Touch suggests that this form of energy healing can ease pain and improve quality of life (*Holistic Nursing Practice*, May–June 2004). Researchers are also studying the effectiveness of Reiki, another energy therapy, for FMS.

Feldenkrais Method. I’ve known FMS patients who have benefited from this gentle form of movement education. It can make you aware of poor posture or movement patterns you may have developed to accommodate chronic pain, and show you how to move more easily and with less discomfort.

Homeopathy. A clinical trial led by Iris Bell, MD, PhD, director of research at the Program in Integrative Medicine, found that FMS patients who got individually prescribed homeopathic remedies had less pain and better overall health

than those given a placebo (*Rheumatology*, May 2004). A homeopath can select a remedy best suited to your symptoms.

Massage. In one study, FMS patients who received massages twice a week for five weeks slept better and had less pain. In addition, they had lower levels of substance P, a brain chemical that is associated with increased pain perception (*Journal of Clinical Rheumatology*, April 2002).

Watsu. This soothing therapy combines massage and stretching while you float in a heated pool. A recent study suggests Watsu can reduce pain and improve daily functioning in FMS patients (*Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies*, July 2005). To find a practitioner, visit waba.edu.

Alternative healing systems. Practitioners of ayurvedic or traditional Chinese medicine can offer highly individualized treatment to FMS patients, and there’s a strong emphasis on preventive self-care. 

For more, see *Natural Treatments for Fibromyalgia: An A to Z Guide* by Kenna Simmons (Arthritis Foundation, 2003); to order, visit arthritis.org or call (800) 207-8633.

Giving Thanks to Your Body

 n Thanksgiving, many people pause to acknowledge the meal they’re about to eat, the friends and family who are with them, and the many gifts that life has brought. Saying grace is an expression of gratitude. The concept of gratitude can also be applied to the body by appreciating its many miracles and amazing functions, suggests Monica Myklebust, MD, a graduate Fellow of the Program in Integrative Medicine and now director of the University of Michigan Integrative Medicine Clinical Services. She has developed a body gratitude practice that she uses herself and with her patients. I think it offers a practical tool to feel more comfortable in your body and establish a dialogue with it.

The inspiration behind Dr. Myklebust’s body gratitude practice came on the eve of her first marathon. She had trained hundreds of miles with few problems and as she gazed at her feet, she felt a deep sense of gratitude for all they had accomplished. She felt thankful for the efforts of her legs, knees, and arms. Her appreciation included not only the external parts of her body, but also its internal organs—her kidneys, liver, lungs, and

heart—which work tirelessly on her behalf. And she focused on her mind, which she was trusting with the mental challenge of running 26 miles. From these thoughts came an idea for a guided-imagery recording to help others remember the body’s wisdom and acknowledge its service.

What it is. Dr. Myklebust’s body gratitude practice begins at the head and progressively works its way to the toes, bringing awareness to various body parts and recognizing all they allow you to do and experience every day. You might thank your ears for all you can hear and be grateful for your hands for their creative abilities. Next, it suggests you turn your attention inward to your muscles, nerves, stomach, immune system, and brain, for example, to recognize the countless ways they function and support you physically and mentally. Instead of focusing on your looks or how your body has changed—your hair thinning or joints getting more stiff—body gratitude helps shift your perspective and eases any feelings of loss. You can rediscover the joy of your body and feel grateful for all that you *have*. While your eyes might now be weaker, perhaps your heart

and lungs remain vital and strong.

Why to do it. You may take your body for granted until something goes wrong, or you may focus on its shortcomings or the loss of some function with aging. Dr. Myklebust tells me that she sees many patients who because of a stroke, arthritis, or cancer feel mad at or abandoned by their body. She has also worked with some overweight women who have lost touch with their body and don’t hear when various symptoms call out for attention. Symptoms such as pain or a muscle spasm can tell you something—if you listen to them. A regular practice of gratitude can foster a deeper connection to and awareness of the body and open up the lines of communication between you and it. In doing so, you can start to “own” your body, have a better relationship with it, and take good care of yourself. Practicing gratitude allows your harsh judgments and criticisms of your body to fade to the background and replaces them with compassion and healing. And it may restore a sense of wholeness and balance between body, mind, and spirit.

To purchase a copy of Dr. Myklebust’s CD, visit bodygratitude.com. 

Ask Dr. Weil Microwave Popcorn; Cold Sores; and More

I've read that the fluorotelomers in microwave popcorn packaging can migrate to the popcorn. Is this unhealthy?

I would be cautious. Fluorotelomers are carbon compounds that are often used in food packaging like microwave popcorn bags, sandwich wrappers, and French fry boxes because they have non-stick and grease-repellent properties. However, fluorotelomers can degrade into PFOA, a suspected carcinogen. FDA research indicates that small amounts of PFOA can migrate from the packaging to the oil used on the popcorn as a result of high temperatures. Levels are well within what the EPA deems safe, but until we know more, I would follow the Environmental Working Group's advice to use alternative methods of preparing this popular snack. Place

about a quarter-cup of popcorn into a brown-paper lunch bag, mix with oil and seasoning, seal with one staple (not enough metal to cause a spark), and microwave for two to three minutes. Or you can cook it the old-fashioned way in a cast iron pan, or use a hot-air popcorn popper. PFOA can also be released when Teflon is overheated, so I recommend that you cook with these pans at lower temperatures.

Is there any long-term risk from taking lysine supplements in order to prevent cold sores?

Studies on lysine suggest that this amino acid is good at preventing cold sores (herpes simplex), but may not be as helpful once you have one. While there have not been many

5 Steps for Soothing Eczema

There are many causes for the constant itch of eczema, including allergens, workplace irritants, stress, heat, and—oddly—both extreme dryness and extreme moisture. Whatever the reason, the results are the same: redness, blistering, scaly plaques, and deep cracks, mainly on the hands, face, wrists, ankles, and the folds of elbows and knees. This inflammatory skin condition is common in babies, and while many of them grow out of it, others will have to deal with eczema's uncomfortable and sometimes disfiguring flare-ups throughout life.

The key to healing eczema is to strengthen the skin's ability to hold moisture in or keep it out, and to stop the desire to scratch. I recommend a five-part strategy that deals with the problem from outside and inside:

Eliminate allergens and irritants.

The most common form of eczema is atopic dermatitis, often found in people with a family history of asthma or hay fever. So a good first step is to identify potential allergens and irritants—such as foods, chemicals in shampoos and lotions, wool, nickel jewelry, and environmental troublemakers like dust mites and pollen—and decrease exposure to them. I've seen dramatic improvement in some

people who have eliminated milk, wheat, soy, or corn from their diets.

Protect your skin. A moisture-proof barrier must be maintained on the skin to reduce the intense dryness that causes itching and provide effective protection against viruses and bacteria. Use an allergen-free emollient cream or ointment like Aquaphor or Eucerin right after bathing with mild soap and warm (not hot) water; re-apply several times a day.

Limit topical steroids. Avoid regular use of steroid creams for itching, saving them for severe flares only, as they have rebound effects that can increase flares. Instead, place a cloth soaked in cold water on itchy areas, or apply a soothing cream or lotion containing chaparral, calendula, or chamomile. Wear cotton and other soft clothing in layers, to avoid skin irritation and the overheating and sweating that can lead to flare-ups.

Soothe the immune system. You can calm an overactive immune system by including anti-inflammatory foods and beverages such as organic fruits and vegetables, whole grains, salmon, walnuts, ground flaxseed, and green and oolong teas. Fish oil in capsules or liquid form (start with 2 grams a day) also reduces inflammation. While studies are contradictory,

I have also seen good results in adult eczema patients who took 500 mg twice a day of gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) supplements like black currant or evening primrose oil, especially in combination with an anti-inflammatory diet. GLA nourishes the skin.

Explore hypnotherapy. The skin is extremely responsive to mind-body techniques, so I highly recommend hypnotherapy with either a professional or a recording. At the Program in Integrative Medicine, psychologist Steven Gurgevich, PhD, uses hypnotherapy to help patients understand why they are itching. He teaches people how to communicate with their immune system to stop production of the histamines behind the itch and also helps them develop healing visualizations of clear, smooth, comfortable skin. In his experience, eczema often reflects unconscious emotional issues that are "itching to get out." Dr. Gurgevich says, "Your troubles may be out of mind, but they're not necessarily out of your body yet." 

For more, go to nationaleczema.org or skincarephysicians.com/eczemanet. To find a hypnotherapist, visit asch.net. You can order Dr. Gurgevich's CD *Skin Healing at tranceformation.com* or (866) 506-1700.

long-term studies, no major side effects have been reported with supplement use at recommended levels. Lysine is naturally found in many foods such as red meats, fish, and dairy products, but can also be taken in tablet or capsule form. If you are prone to cold sores, I suggest taking 500 to 1,000 mg per day on an empty stomach as a daily preventive. It's also helpful to minimize your consumption of seeds, nuts, peas, and chocolate. These foods contain arginine, another amino acid, which the herpes virus needs to grow.

Why are so many women who never smoked coming down with lung cancer?

Smoking is mostly responsible for the 600 percent jump in female lung cancers in the last 80 years, but it's not always the culprit. There are other forms of lung cancer that can occur in nonsmokers. Environmental factors like exposure to radon, asbestos, or secondhand smoke can also raise your risk, as can heredity and getting older. It is true that women who don't smoke are more likely to get lung cancer than nonsmoking men. Scientists suspect estrogen is partly to blame: Lung cancers appear to grow faster when exposed to this hormone. Also, a type of lung cancer that's more common in women and nonsmokers, called adenocarcinoma, is becoming more prevalent. It tends to strike at a younger age and seems more closely tied to genetics than some other forms of lung cancer. Scientists don't know why adenocarcinoma is on the rise, but it probably occurs earlier in life because it's not dependent on years of lung irritation from smoking. On the bright side, nonsmokers are more responsive to new drugs (Tarceva and Iressa) that act against genetics-related tumors.

Can high doses of antioxidants act as pro-oxidants instead?

Yes. Antioxidants like vitamins C and E, selenium, and carotenoids normally block oxidation reactions that generate free radicals, dangerous compounds that can harm the immune system and damage DNA. Antioxidants can also help destroy free radicals. But some antioxidants can function as pro-oxidants under certain circumstances, causing (rather than preventing) problems. Although it's still unclear what those circumstances are, experts believe that taking antioxidants in high doses or in isolated forms may be partly responsible. This would help explain why some studies have found that antioxidants in food protect against disease but aren't beneficial as supplements. (One example is beta-carotene, which appears to help prevent lung cancer in smokers when consumed in the diet but increases risk when taken in isolated form in a pill.) Despite such findings, I don't think you should stop taking antioxidants. Instead, I suggest getting them from a wholesome diet first and keeping supplemental doses to those recommended in my daily antioxidant regimen: 200 mg of vitamin C, 400 IU of natural vitamin E (or 80 mg of mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols), 200 mcg of selenium, and 10,000 to 15,000 IU of mixed carotenoids. 

Soy Protects Bones at Midlife. Soy foods may help postmenopausal women avoid bone fractures. A study that looked at soy consumption among more than 24,000 women in China over nearly five years found that fracture risk was reduced by almost 50 percent in those who ate the most soy foods. These women took in about 13 grams of soy protein daily, the amount found in 2 cups of soy milk or a medium-size piece of tofu. Soy appeared most effective at delaying bone loss within the first 10 years after menopause. (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, September 12, 2005)

Comment: While soy protein and its isoflavones are known to help prevent bone loss, this study is the first to look at actual fractures rather than bone density. Aim for a couple servings of whole soy foods a day.

Exercise Reduces Pain with Age. Older people who get regular aerobic exercise have 25 percent less muscle and joint pain than their less active peers. A study compared nearly 500 people in their mid-60s and 70s who did at least five hours of vigorous activity each week, including running, brisk walking, or swimming, to some 400 older adults who got less than two hours weekly. Over 14 years, the more active group had a higher risk of injury, but fewer aches and pains. (*Arthritis Research & Therapy*, September 19, 2005)

Comment: Many of these older exercisers were runners, which probably upped their odds for injury, but similar benefits might be had from brisk walking, swimming, or cycling with less chance of getting hurt.

B Vitamins Bad for Heart? A controversial study suggests that taking B vitamins may not protect the heart and could even be harmful. Previous research has linked high blood levels of the amino acid homocysteine with increased risk of cardiovascular disease, and B vitamins (including folic acid) are known to lower homocysteine. But a study of nearly 4,000 heart attack survivors, presented at a European Society of Cardiology meeting in September, found that those who took both folic acid (800 mcg per day) and vitamin B-6 (40 mg) for about three years were 20 percent *more* likely to have another heart attack or stroke than those who took folic acid only, B-6 only, or a placebo.

Comment: I asked Robert Bulgarelli, DO, director of integrative cardiology for Main Line Health Heart Center in suburban Philadelphia, for his opinion. He says more research is needed before we'll know if supplemental B vitamins actually pose problems for heart attack survivors, and it's possible that B vitamins have more of a protective effect in people who don't already have heart disease. He has not advised his patients to stop taking B-complex supplements based on this one unpublished study, and I agree with him. 

Longevity Lessons from the Okinawans

No one wants to be old in America, where people try to hide their age so as not to be thought doddering or hopelessly out of date. In my three visits to the Japanese island of Okinawa, I have seen a far healthier model of aging. There older people are cherished, celebrated, and deeply involved in life. As a result, even those over 80—what geriatricians call “the oldest old”—tend to be youthful looking, physically and socially active, and intellectually lively.

You may have read about these elders in the best-selling book *The Okinawa Program* (Three Rivers Press, 2002), written by the lead investigators in the long-running Okinawa Centenarian Study (brothers Bradley Willcox, MD, and D. Craig Willcox, PhD, as well as Makoto Suzuki, MD). Okinawans are the world's healthiest and longest-lived people: They have the lowest rates of heart disease, stroke, and cancer in the world, and the highest percentage of people living over 100. The residents of this mostly rural island not only live longer, but they generally stay healthy and active until death.

What most struck me about older people in Okinawa was their pride and joy in their age. Folks would just bound up to me and introduce themselves by name and age—something that certainly doesn't happen here! And I was always surprised by their ages, because most of them looked so much younger.

The Okinawan secret to staying young is not simple, of course, but rather a complex blend of habits, attitude, and culture. Here are seven lessons from Okinawa that might help us all find more joy in our own ripening into old age:

1 Take pride in your status as an elder. In rural Okinawa, old age is an accomplishment, not a catastrophe. Elders hold a vital place in the continuum between past and future generations. Key birthdays from age 73 to 100 are marked with special celebrations where elders touch younger family and friends to symbolically pass on their good lives and good health. The one for the 97th birthday marks the official beginning of second childhood and end of responsibility.

2 Stay active. There is no Okinawan word for “retirement.” Older people continue to work, garden, and pursue their interests with passion and purpose. I was surprised by the leanness and agility of people in their 80s and older. This maintenance of strength and physical ability means that even those over 100 usually live independently. So don't put off trying something new because of age—you're never too old.

3 Help each other. Okinawan village life is built on the principle of *yuiamaru*, or mutual assistance. People watch out for and help their neighbors as a matter of course, knowing that helping hands will be there for them when needed. The

strong social fabric is also seen in the *moais*, groups of friends, neighbors, or workmates who meet regularly—sometimes over decades—to provide social and financial support for one another. Everyone chips a small sum into a pot at each meeting, and whoever needs it most at the time takes it home.

4 Have an easygoing attitude. *Taygay* is the Okinawan version of “Don't worry, be happy.” People there respect those with a calm and relaxed attitude toward life, what social scientists call a stress-resistant personality. Gerontologists believe such resilience to life's slings and arrows is an important factor in healthy aging. The Japanese just call the islanders' blithe attitude toward punctuality “Okinawa time.”

5 Let food be your medicine (*nuchi gusui*). The Okinawans believe that a varied diet is the basis of good health: In fact, they usually eat 15 to 18 different foods every day. The staples of their diet are fish, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes, predominantly tofu and other soy foods. Their primary cooking fat is omega-3-rich canola oil, and they use a flavonoid-rich starch from the kudzu vine to thicken soups and stews. They were pioneers in “eating the rainbow,” believing that every meal should contain at least five colors for reasons of both health and aesthetics.

6 Eat in moderation. The Okinawans have an interesting way to prevent overeating—*hara hachi bu*, which means eating only until you feel 80 percent full. There's a scientific rationale for their method: It takes 20 minutes for your brain to receive signals from the stomach that it's full. By stopping before you're full, the brain has a chance to catch up, and you are less likely to overeat and stretch your stomach. In Okinawa, people also eat small portions of each food, making it easier to fit in a wide variety of foods and harder to overeat.

7 Pay attention to the spiritual side of life. There is an adage on this island that goes, “*Isha-hanbun, yuta-hanbun*,” or “To best understand your problem, see both a doctor and a shaman.” In other words, take care of the physical body, but also attend to spiritual health. Okinawans are fond of physical activities with a meditative bent, like karate and tai chi.

The lifestyle choices you make over the years can slow down or speed up your biological clock. Many of the signs of aging we consider inevitable—higher blood pressure, weaker muscles, thinner bones, extra pounds—may be avoidable. So ask yourself: What can I be doing now to make the years after age 70 a time of health, happiness, and vitality? The dynamic elders of Okinawa offer far more useful answers than any of those “anti-aging” remedies I see in the marketplace. 

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Underactive Thyroid

Weight Control Therapies

Exercise & Your Emotions

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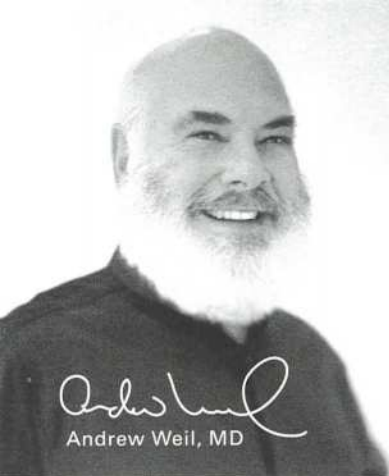
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DECEMBER 2005

self healing

CREATING OPTIMUM HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND SOUL

How Exercise Benefits Your Mood

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ON MY MIND:

Flu Shots

I was quite sick the last time that I had the flu, so now I get the annual shot to spare myself the misery of having it again.

Who needs one? Flu shots can help anyone reduce the odds of falling ill, but they're particularly important for people at higher risk of flu complications, including adults aged 65 or over, children aged 6 to 23 months, pregnant women, health-care workers, and people with chronic conditions like diabetes and heart or lung disease.

What about mercury? Flu shots may contain thimerosal, a preservative containing a small amount of mercury. I don't think there's good evidence to back up claims that mercury in vaccines causes autism, Alzheimer's, or other disorders. If you are concerned, ask your doctor about getting a preservative-free flu shot or the nasal-spray flu vaccine, which does not contain thimerosal. 

Scientists know a lot more about the physical effects of exercise—its ability to strengthen the heart, lungs, and muscles, improve bone health, and lower blood pressure, for example—than they do about its psychological benefits. But research is starting to uncover those payoffs: Regular physical activity appears to boost mood and keep your brain young, fit, and sharp.

How regular exercise lifts spirits remains unclear. One explanation is that it triggers the release of endorphins, the feel-good brain chemicals that dull pain and induce bliss. It's more likely that a cocktail of neurotransmitters including serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine influences mood. Being active helps to release naturally some of the same brain chemicals that are increased by synthetic medications used to manage mood disorders. Moving your body may also work its magic on your mind by improving the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the brain; by increasing body temperature, which relaxes tense muscles; by reducing levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that's directly toxic to brain cells; and by increasing the connections among brain neurons that sharpen memory.

Repetitive and rhythmic movements seem to have a calming effect on the brain and nervous system, much like rocking a baby, and might achieve a similar outcome by enhancing sleep. Exercise also offers a distraction from everyday worries. Plus, there are boosts to self-esteem and confidence that come from accomplishing a goal, mastering a skill, and feeling more in control of your life, and if you exercise outdoors, the enjoyment of natural light and fresh air.

I'd like to describe some specific ways that physical activity is good for your peace of mind, to show that it's possible to walk, swim, cycle, run, hike, or dance your way to a clearer head and cheerier disposition.

Depression. When you're feeling down, it can be hard to overcome the lack of energy and inertia. Yet, there's solid evidence that

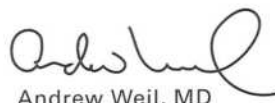
physical activity is highly effective for treating mild to moderate depression and is of benefit in severe cases as well. Exercise can complement talk therapy or perhaps even be an alternative to medications and supplements. A Duke University study of 156 middle-aged and older people who had clinical depression compared the effect of treatment with exercise alone (they ran or walked as a group for at least 30 minutes, three times a week), the antidepressant Zoloft, or both. After 16 weeks, researchers were surprised to find that all three groups showed *comparable* improvements. While those who took Zoloft felt better somewhat sooner, the drug wasn't necessarily more effective than exercise (*Archives of Internal Medicine*, October 25, 1999). In a follow-up study, those who continued to be physically active six months later had the lowest relapse rates: Depression recurred in only 8 percent of exercisers compared with 38 percent in the drug-only group and 31 percent in the exercise-and-drug group (*Psychosomatic Medicine*, October 2000). One reason, suggests the lead researcher, is that exercisers believe they are taking an active role in trying to feel better.

If you're depressed, a group activity or exercising with a friend might be better than going it alone. The support and connection with other people can reduce feelings of isolation and also make exercise a more pleasurable experience that you're more likely to stick with. Aerobic and anaerobic activities (like strength training) appear equally effective for depressive symptoms.

Stress and anxiety. Studies show that aerobic activity done at moderate intensity for at least 20 minutes about three times a week seems to lessen anxious thoughts. A shorter aerobic workout might take the edge off stress. What's most important about using physical activity to affect your mood is doing it regularly. Making notes about your mood before and after a workout can help you see how exercise influences it. 

As we go to press, the H5N1 strain of bird flu that has devastated poultry farms and caused some 70 deaths in Asia is showing up among birds in European nations. The virus doesn't yet spread readily from birds to humans (most infected people worked closely with poultry), and has yet to appear in birds or people in this country. Still, public health officials worry that the virus could mutate into a form that's transmitted easily from person to person, leading to a worldwide pandemic that could rival or exceed the 1918 flu, which killed 50 to 100 million people. Scientists are working on a vaccine (the flu shot is ineffective against avian strains), but it's unlikely that one would be widely available until several months after a pandemic began.

I think you should be concerned but not paranoid about bird flu. I don't yet advise stocking up on the antiviral drug Tamiflu, which is taken orally at the earliest signs of flu symptoms to reduce the length and severity of illness. We don't know how effective the medication would be against a pandemic virus, and inappropriate use of Tamiflu may cause the virus to develop resistance to the drug. Meanwhile, you can reduce your risk of infectious illness by washing your hands frequently and keeping them away from your eyes and nose, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, eating immune-boosting foods (see page 4), and perhaps taking the Chinese herb astragalus as a daily tonic. (Cooked poultry and eggs are safe to eat, because heat destroys flu viruses.) If you're traveling to countries with known outbreaks of bird flu, be sure to avoid poultry farms and contact with animals in live food markets. To stay informed about the latest on bird flu, visit cdc.gov/flu/avian.



Andrew Weil, MD

Andrew Weil, MD, received an AB degree in biology (botany) from Harvard University and his MD from Harvard Medical School. He is director of the Program in Integrative Medicine and clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dr. Weil is an internationally recognized expert on medicinal herbs, mind-body interactions, nutrition, and integrative medicine. He has authored 10 books including the bestsellers *Eight Weeks to Optimum Health* and *Spontaneous Healing*.

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Think Green When You Dry-Clean

"Green" dry cleaning offers an environmentally friendly way to care for your clothes and a safer option for your health. I choose greener methods whenever available. Traditional processes use a cleaning agent called perchloroethylene (perc), which has been found to cause cancer in animals. Although human evidence is inconclusive, perc is considered a probable human carcinogen.

Perc is particularly harmful to dry-cleaning workers: Regular exposure to its vapors can cause dizziness, fatigue, headaches, memory loss, and even liver and kidney problems, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. The average person wouldn't be exposed to dangerous levels of the chemical by wearing garments dry-cleaned with perc, but some people are more sensitive to it. If you get your clothes cleaned by conventional methods, remove them from the plastic bags and air them out when you get home, preferably in a room with good ventilation. This will minimize the possibility of breathing in any lingering chemical fumes.

Perc is not good for the environment. When it's discharged into surrounding areas as a byproduct of dry cleaning, it can seep

into water sources and the soil, where it can have toxic effects on plants.

Even though 85 percent of dry-cleaning businesses in the United States continue to use perc, there are healthier alternatives. In 2003, *Consumer Reports* did a test of the three less toxic methods. Clothes treated with liquid carbon dioxide cleaners fared the best in terms of retaining their color and texture, looking even better than garments cleaned with perc. Silicone-based "GreenEarth" cleaning was a close second, and in third was a process called wet-cleaning. Greenpeace recommends wet-cleaning, which uses water, natural soaps, steam, and heat. My preference is carbon dioxide cleaning, which is least toxic and most energy efficient. (To find cleaners that use carbon dioxide, visit hangersdrycleaners.com/locations.html.)

Green dry cleaning now costs about the same as or slightly more than its conventional counterpart, and I hope consumers have greater access to these approaches in the future. You can also hand-wash your clothes; many garments labeled "dry-clean only" can be cared for at home. Just use cold water and a gentle cleanser, then air-dry. 

Help for Hypothyroidism

Your thyroid, a butterfly-shaped gland beneath your Adam's apple, weighs less than an ounce, but it's a heavyweight in terms of your health. The gland produces hormones that regulate all aspects of metabolism, and when it doesn't generate enough hormones, problems can appear throughout the body. An underactive thyroid, or hypothyroidism, can cause fatigue, increased sensitivity to cold, hair loss, dry skin, constipation, muscle and joint pain, weight gain, depression, and elevated cholesterol, among other problems. The most common cause of hypothyroidism in the United States is Hashimoto's thyroiditis, a chronic autoimmune condition. Menopausal decline in hormone levels can affect the immune system, which may help explain why hypothyroidism occurs mainly in women over age 40.

A blood test that measures levels of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH, a product of the pituitary gland) is commonly used to diagnose hypothyroidism. However, some people with "normal" TSH readings have sluggish thyroids, so additional blood tests may be needed to detect the condition. (Some alternative practitioners use body temperature to diagnose hypothyroidism, but I don't consider this reliable.)

Treating a Sluggish Thyroid

Hypothyroidism usually requires treatment with thyroid replacement medications. Most conventional physicians prescribe Synthroid (levothyroxine or T4), but I prefer preparations like Thyrolar that contain both the T3 and T4 hormones. This combination is what the thyroid actually produces, and may have a better effect on mood than T4 alone.

In addition to thyroid replacement drugs, I suggest lifestyle measures and other natural approaches to improve thyroid function. Some ideas below are from Angela LaSalle, MD, a graduate Associate Fellow of the Program in Integrative Medicine who now practices at Fort Wayne Endocrinology in Indiana and treats many patients with hypothyroidism.

Diet. I've found that an anti-inflammatory diet is helpful for autoimmune conditions like Hashimoto's thyroiditis, and Dr. LaSalle agrees that reducing inflammation can improve hormone balance and aid in weight loss. Avoid trans fats, and limit saturated and polyunsaturated fats. Increase your intake of omega-3 fatty acids: Sources include salmon, sardines, walnuts, ground flax seeds, hemp seeds, and fortified eggs. Use extra-virgin olive oil as your primary cooking oil. Reduce consumption of high glycemic load carbohydrates, like foods made with flour and sugar. Eat lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. And spice up your meals with ginger and turmeric, two anti-inflammatory herbs. (For more information, see my new book, *Healthy Aging*.)

Certain foods called goitrogens may interfere with the production of thyroid hormones, particularly when eaten uncooked. They include cruciferous vegetables (like broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, and kale) as well as peanuts, pine nuts, and soybeans. It's fine to eat these foods in reasonable amounts, but don't overdo it. For instance, a

daily serving of whole soy foods—such as one cup of soy milk or one half cup of tofu—should pose no problems, but it may be best to avoid soy supplements (including soy protein powders), which are highly concentrated sources of soy.

Supplements. Dr. LaSalle typically advises people with hypothyroidism to take four supplements: selenium, B-complex, fish oil, and Coenzyme Q10. (All are safe to use if you're on thyroid hormone replacement.) Selenium is an important mineral for thyroid function because it activates an enzyme that helps convert T4 to T3; take 200 mcg a day. Riboflavin (vitamin B-2), niacin (B-3), and pyridoxine (B-6) play roles in making thyroid hormone, and B vitamins may also help counter fatigue; take a daily B-50 B-complex supplement. The omega-3s in fish-oil products may ease aches and pains and benefit depression; take 1 to 2 grams a day of a product containing both EPA and DHA. CoQ10, which sparks energy production within cells, may lessen fatigue, and it also has heart-protective effects; take 50 to 100 mg of a softgel form with your largest meal of the day.

Some alternative practitioners advise taking kelp supplements for their iodine content. While iodine deficiency can cause hypothyroidism, taking this element won't help if you're not lacking in it, and iodine deficiency is rare in this country. I'd pass on these products. Certain supplements, such as calcium, iron, and psyllium and other fiber supplements, may interfere with thyroid replacement drugs if you take them at the same time, so allow three or more hours between taking these supplements and thyroid hormone.

Exercise. Being physically active stimulates thyroid gland secretion and increases tissue sensitivity to thyroid hormone. Exercise can also shed pounds and boost mood. Get regular, moderate aerobic activity, such as brisk walking. If muscle or joint pain is a problem, try exercising in a warm pool. In addition, consider practicing yoga to increase flexibility and promote relaxation. A yoga pose called the Shoulder Stand stimulates the thyroid and has helped many of my hypothyroid patients. Learn it from a yoga teacher or a book, and slowly work up to doing it five minutes or more a day. This pose may be more effective if you visualize your gland producing more thyroid hormone as you practice it.

Stress reduction. Chronic stress may depress thyroid function, so practice a relaxation technique like breath work or meditation each day. Dr. LaSalle often suggests creative activities like singing, playing a musical instrument, or making art. From an energetic perspective, she says, the thyroid is located in the throat chakra (energy center), and "finding your voice" through creative expression may help to release energy blockages that contribute to thyroid dysfunction.

Acupuncture and Chinese medicine. Acupuncture may help correct hormonal imbalances, and other aspects of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) have also shown benefits: Chinese herbs may reduce symptoms of hypothyroidism, and moxibustion (in which specific acupuncture points are stimulated by burning herbs near them) may improve thyroid function in people with Hashimoto's thyroiditis. To find an acupuncturist or a TCM practitioner, visit nccaom.org. **SP**

To learn more, see *Living Well with Hypothyroidism* by Mary J. Shomon (HarperResource, 2005) or visit thyroid-info.com.

Nourishing Foods to Boost Your Immune System

With winter approaching and worries about colds and flu gaining steam, ideas for boosting your immune system are a hot commodity. It's widely known that a well-functioning immune system is a cornerstone of good health. And I think diet can be an important influence on it. The food choices you make and the nutrients supplied by your diet can either strengthen your immune system so that it protects you from illness and helps you recover sooner if you get sick, or they can weaken your body's defenses, leaving you vulnerable to everything that's going around. The immune system can grow stronger if you lead a healthy lifestyle. Everything from getting enough sleep and regular moderate exercise to reducing stress, washing hands frequently, and not smoking are integral steps in this process.

When your immune system is functioning optimally, it recognizes foreign invaders that don't belong in the body, such

body with antioxidants such as vitamins A, C, and E and the mineral selenium. Vitamin C, which is found in citrus fruits, broccoli, green peppers, tomatoes, and berries, has a reputation as an immune-boosting powerhouse. Other nutrients thought to have important influences on the immune system include vitamin B-6 and folic acid, as well as the minerals zinc, iron, and copper. Zinc, found in beans, meat, and seafood, has been touted as a cold-fighter, especially in supplement form, but I don't find the scientific evidence convincing. I've included a delicious soup recipe from my book *The Healthy Kitchen* (Knopf, 2003) that's easy to make and packed with wholesome ingredients to bolster your immunity.

Garlic and onions. Eat garlic regularly not only for its flavor but also its medicinal value. When I'm sick or feel a cold coming on, I'll chop one or two cloves a day into my food to take advantage of its potent antibacterial effect as well as its immune-stimulating properties. I prefer using the fresh herb to taking garlic supplements. Adding garlic late in the cooking process or letting it sit for 10 minutes after chopping or crushing it preserves more allicin, the main compound responsible for its disease-fighting activity and pungent smell. Onions have not been as well studied as garlic, but they have similar immune-enhancing compounds.

Mushrooms. It's worth getting to know some Asian mushrooms for their immune-enhancing qualities. These include shiitake, the flavorful black mushrooms of Asian cuisine, now widely available in stores; oyster mushrooms, which are less flavorful than shiitake but also less expensive; maitake, originally from Japan, which are very tasty and meaty; and enoki, a pale, slender type with little flavor and a pleasing texture. Unlike the white button mushroom that's commonly eaten here and its larger capped cousin, the portobello, these Asian fungi have the beneficial complex sugars known as polysaccharides. Whether you eat these mushrooms fresh or dried and reconstituted, the polysaccharides they contain seem to be the active compounds that may increase resistance to bacteria and viruses and even help destroy malignant cells.

A lower protein diet. Since the immune system focuses primarily on protein molecules in determining whether or not a substance belongs in the body, it makes sense to eat a lower protein diet with less meat, poultry, and other animal foods. If you eat fish, choose varieties with the fewest toxic contaminants. Rely more on a plant-based diet with vegetable protein coming from soy foods, beans, other legumes, nuts, and seeds. Some studies have found that vegetarians have stronger immune systems than meat-eaters, which may in part be due to the overall quality of their diet, its lower levels of fat, and possibly reduced intake of pesticides and antibiotic residues in their food. I've also noticed that when my patients with allergies or autoimmunity eliminate cow's milk and products made with it and follow a

Tomato, Corn, and Basil Soup

Sauté the onions in the olive oil in a saucepan over medium-high heat until they just begin to brown. Add the garlic and sauté for a minute, stirring constantly. Pour in the tomatoes and cook, stirring occasionally, until they give up their juice. Cover and continue cooking about 5 minutes more.

Add the water and corn to the soup and cook until the corn is soft and the kernels lose their raw taste, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir in the basil, mix well, remove from heat, and serve immediately.

Serves 4. (Choose organic ingredients when possible.)

INGREDIENTS

1 cup finely chopped onion
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 to 4 cloves garlic, minced
28 ounces canned ground tomatoes
1 cup water
3 cups corn, cut from the cob,
or 1 pound frozen sweet corn
salt and pepper, to taste
1 cup finely chopped fresh basil

PER SERVING

calories	191
carbohydrates	31 g
protein	5 g
fat	8 g
fiber	4 g

as germs, viruses, toxins, and malignant cells, and attempts to eliminate or inactivate them. But immune responses can be weakened by chronic stress, overuse of antibiotics and immunosuppressive drugs, overexposure to harmful chemicals and radiation, and failure to practice the other lifestyle measures mentioned above.

Scientists say that the complexity of the immune system makes it hard to fully understand the effect that diet has on it. Nevertheless, some foods and nutrients appear to enhance immunity. And a daily antioxidant supplement can provide nutritional insurance and disease protection.

Vitamins and minerals. A diet that includes a rainbow mix of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, and nuts is good for immunity as well as optimum health. It supplies the

low-protein diet, this helps quiet their symptoms. Casein, or milk protein, is an immune system irritant for many people.

Water and other liquids. Water has no direct immune-boosting effect, but being dehydrated can predispose the body to illness. Taking in lots of good-quality water keeps mucous membranes that line the nose, mouth, and eyes moist. These membranes form the body's first line of defense against infection, trapping germs before they cause trouble. And sufficient water helps to flush out toxins and waste products from your cells. Aim for six to eight glasses of fluids a day. This may include caffeine-free teas, and mineral or sparkling waters to which you add a *little* fruit juice, lemon, or lime for flavor.

Some dietary factors might compromise the immune system. There's some evidence that diets high in fat might depress immune responses by weakening the function of white blood cells and narrowing the circulatory pathways where immune cells travel. So keep your fat intake moderate and include some sources of "good" fats like olive oil, avocado, nuts, and omega-3 rich fish and flax. Studies show that obesity can impair immune function, making heavier people more vulnerable to infections—a fact that might also hold true for extreme thinness. Not surprisingly, too much sugar in the diet as well as too much alcohol or caffeine can weaken immune response. 

Homeopathic First Aid for Kids

Homeopathy can be a good option for treating the short-term problems that are common in children and teenagers. Homeopathic remedies are safe, gentle, and nontoxic. Rather than suppressing symptoms like typical over-the-counter medications, these remedies are intended to support the body's own natural healing powers. The tiny pellets or

tablets are sweet too, which makes them a hit with kids.

Although there are popular combination homeopathic products that contain a mixture of several different remedies, I think that classical homeopathy—using just one remedy at a time until you find the correct one—provides a better, longer-lasting action. To find the most effective remedy, parents must pay close attention

to a child's physical and emotional state. Which general symptoms of a condition are strongest in his particular case? Does he feel better with heat or with cold, at night or during the day, in one position or another?

There are usually several homeopathic remedies that can be considered for any health concern, but don't worry too much about choosing the wrong one: The worst thing that can happen if you give your child a dose of the wrong remedy is that it will not work. A good guide to family homeopathy can help you to narrow down your choices. Three volumes that I recommend are *Homeopathic Medicine for Children and Infants* by Dana Ullman, MPH (Jeremy Tarcher, 1992), *Homeopathic Self-Care* by Robert Ullman, ND, and Judyth Reichenberg-Ullman, ND (Prima, 1997), and *The American Institute of Homeopathy Handbook for Parents* by Edward Shalts, MD (Jossey-Bass, 2005).

Some of the more useful remedies for common conditions of childhood are listed in the box. Except for the few cases noted, these remedies are taken as pellets or tablets, which are placed under the tongue and allowed to dissolve. Follow package or guidebook instructions as to the dosage amount, strength (usually 12C or 30C), and frequency. Stop when the symptoms improve. If a remedy does not work within three doses, try another remedy. Do not, however, delay medical treatment for anything that could potentially be serious. 

Useful Remedies for Common Complaints

Sprains, strains, and bruises: *Arnica* oral pellets or topical cream first. Then *Rhus* if sprain feels better with motion, or *Ruta* if it feels worse.

Anxiety: *Gelsemium* for anxiety before a big game or recital, *Stramonium* for fear of the dark, or *Aconitum* for panic.

Colds: *Allium* if eyes and nose run, *Kali bichromicum* if sinuses hurt, *Pulsatilla* if mucus is thick and yellow-green, or *Gelsemium* if child feels weak and sleepy.

Nerve pain: *Hypericum* for fingers slammed in doors or for dental pain.

Minor burns/sunburn: *Calendula* orally or as a topical cream.

Earache: *Chamomilla* if a child calms down when carried, *Belladonna* if pain in the right ear comes on suddenly, or *Pulsatilla* for an earache after a cold.

Upset tummy: *Nux vomica* if indigestion is due to emotional stress

or overindulgence, *Carbo vegetalis* if a child feels exhausted, or *Ipecacuanha* if nausea isn't relieved by vomiting.

Car/sea sickness: *Tabacum* if better in fresh air or *Cocculus* if worse.

Insomnia: *Coffea* for a child who is mentally overactive, *Ignatia* for one yawning frequently, or *Kali phosphoricum* for one who gets night terrors.

Flu: *Oscillocochinum* (*Anas barbariae*) taken at the first sign of flu may prevent a full-fledged attack. Other options include *Belladonna* if there is a very high fever of sudden onset, *Ferrum phosphoricum* if a high fever has come on slowly, *Eupatorium* if the principal complaint is aching muscles and joints, or *Bryonia* if there's a throbbing headache.

Stomach flu: If there's vomiting, diarrhea, and weakness, use *Veratrum album*.

Ask Dr. Weil Leg Cramps; Low Female Libido; and More

What foods or vitamins can help with terrible leg cramps?

If your cramps are terrible, find out why from your doctor, since they could indicate a serious circulatory problem, like narrowed arteries. Occasional leg cramps, especially at night, can be a result of dehydration, so always drink plenty of water, especially during hot weather and physical activity. Stretching before and after you exercise can help as well. A deficiency of calcium, magnesium, or potassium, three minerals that act as muscle relaxants, could also be the culprit. I recommend supplementing with a total of 1,000 mg of calcium a day and 500 mg of magnesium. Divide this into smaller doses throughout the day, including one before bedtime. As for diet, make sure you eat potassium-rich foods like

bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, and oranges. Cut down on caffeine and alcohol: Both are dehydrating, and caffeine increases muscle tension. Finally, don't smoke, since it restricts blood flow throughout your circulatory system.

I'm a postmenopausal woman who has lost her sex drive. Is there anything you can suggest?

I'd recommend testosterone, a hormone that influences sex drive in both women and men. In the years leading up to menopause, testosterone levels decrease significantly. A postmenopausal woman has about two-thirds of the amount she had when she was younger, and this might partly explain why a woman's interest in sex often wanes at midlife. There is

Be Aware of B-12 Deficiency

A deficiency of vitamin B-12, a nutrient that's needed to keep red blood cells healthy and nerves functioning properly, was once thought to be rare. But now some researchers suggest it may be the most common nutritional deficiency in the developing world and possibly the United States.

Who's at risk? One form of B-12 deficiency causes a rare condition called pernicious anemia, in which red blood cells grow larger in size but fewer in number. This occurs because the body can't produce intrinsic factor, a protein needed to absorb B-12. People with pernicious anemia need injections of B-12 to replace deficient stores, but can eventually take daily oral supplements. A more common cause of B-12 deficiency occurs in older adults who absorb reduced amounts of the vitamin because they have less stomach acid. The National Academy of Sciences estimates up to 30 percent of people over 50 lose the ability to adequately absorb B-12 from food.

Still, B-12 deficiency doesn't just affect older people, and it often goes undetected. Researchers analyzed blood levels of B-12 in 3,000 people aged 26 to 83 and were surprised to find that nearly 40 percent of them

had levels in the "low-normal" range, more than 16 percent were nearly deficient, and almost 9 percent were deficient (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, February 2000).

Aging or lack of B-12? The symptoms of B-12 deficiency might be mistaken for the various neurological or cognitive changes often seen with aging, such as memory loss, confusion, and fatigue as well as difficulty walking, balance problems, and loss of appetite. It's easy to misdiagnose B-12 deficiency since some symptoms resemble those of Alzheimer's disease, a reason why some physicians suggest a B-12 test if dementia is suspected. Its symptoms might also be confused with those of multiple sclerosis, neuropathy ("pins and needles" sensations in the legs and arms), early Parkinson's disease, or chronic fatigue syndrome. Low levels of B-12 and folic acid, another B vitamin, are also linked with an increased risk of depression.

Absorption difficulties. It's hard not to get enough B-12 in your diet because it's needed in very small amounts and is found in fish, meat, poultry, dairy products, eggs, and fortified cereals. (Vegans who don't eat any animal products and don't take a daily multivitamin are at greatest

risk, especially vegan children.) Most cases of deficiency occur when the body can't absorb or use the vitamin.

B-12 has a complex absorption process; it needs to be uncoupled from the protein it's bound to in food. This happens when the stomach produces enough acid and the digestive enzyme pepsin. Once it's released from food, the vitamin must combine with intrinsic factor to be absorbed by the small intestine. But the stomach lining in people over 50 thins with age, and this reduces its production of acid and pepsin, resulting in less of the vitamin being separated from food and less getting absorbed. Other digestive difficulties, such as Crohn's disease or ulcers, as well as stomach surgery and frequent antacid use can also interfere with the absorption of B-12.

My advice: While B-12 in food might be difficult to absorb by people over 50, this is not true for the vitamin in supplement form or in a fortified food, where it's added during processing. You can get sufficient amounts from a daily multivitamin or B-50 B-complex supplement; B-12 is also sold separately as tablets, but I prefer oral sprays and sublingual (under the tongue) forms, which are well absorbed. 

Health in the News

good scientific evidence that small increases in testosterone can boost sexual desire and arousal in postmenopausal women. While the FDA has yet to approve the hormone as a treatment for declining female libido, your doctor can prescribe it to you from a compounding pharmacy. (To find a compounding pharmacy, visit iacprx.org/referral_service/index.html.) The best method is a skin patch, which delivers the hormone in a steady dose so that it can be evenly absorbed. Research on these patches as well as testosterone sprays, topical creams or gels, and oral supplements is ongoing. In small amounts, there should be no masculinizing changes. It's still best to start with the lowest dose possible, and be monitored for potential side effects such as acne.

Of course, low sex drive can also be the result of depression, stress, certain medications, or relationship conflict, all of which deserve attention in their own right.

Should I drink water with my meals? My grandmother says not to, but I think it would help with my digestion.

If you enjoy drinking water with meals, then go ahead. Some people claim that drinking water will dilute digestive juices, slow down digestion, and reduce the absorption of nutrients, but I don't think there's any truth to these beliefs or any harm posed by drinking water with your meals. I do so all the time. Whether or not you drink it with meals, water freely passes in and out of the stomach and intestines as a normal part of the digestive process. Foods actually need to be diluted before their nutrients can be properly absorbed. Also, it may be helpful to drink water with meals if you're watching your weight, since it gives you a feeling of fullness before you have eaten too much.

I've heard that high cholesterol may be linked with prostate cancer. Is this true?

Yes, there is evidence emerging that elevated cholesterol may contribute to the development or progression of prostate cancer. Population studies have linked the malignancy with high cholesterol levels and Western diets high in cholesterol. Rates of prostate cancer in rural areas of China and Japan, where low-fat diets are customary, are up to 90 percent lower than in the West. And a recent study involving mice suggests high cholesterol levels may accelerate prostate tumor growth by altering chemical signaling patterns within tumor cells. The researchers also found that cholesterol-lowering statin drugs may inhibit cancer growth in animals (*Journal of Clinical Investigation*, April 2005).

But this finding doesn't mean that men who have prostate cancer or are at risk for it should necessarily go on statins. Changes in diet, exercise, and stress levels can also drive down cholesterol levels and might have similar benefits for prostate health. To learn more, see *Self Healing's* special report on lowering cholesterol; to purchase (\$19.95 plus \$3.95 shipping), visit drweilselfhealing.com or call (888) 337-9345. 

Being Active at Midlife Cuts Alzheimer's Risk.

People who exercise more during middle age greatly reduce their chances of developing Alzheimer's disease, scientists have learned. In a study that monitored the fitness habits of almost 1,500 older adults in Sweden for nearly 35 years, those who exercised at least twice a week lowered their odds of Alzheimer's and dementia by 50 to 60 percent compared to their sedentary peers. And physical activity appeared to have the biggest impact on people most genetically susceptible to Alzheimer's. This research is the first to show an association between activity levels in middle age and a reduction in Alzheimer's disease later in life. (*The Lancet Neurology*, November 2005)

Comment: This is a very important new finding and is consistent with what I've previously said about the importance of exercise in healthy aging.

Magnets Are No Match for Foot Pain. Wearing magnetic shoe insoles offered no more relief from foot pain than using foam cushioning, a recent study points out. Mayo Clinic researchers compared some 40 workers who used magnetic foot insoles for at least four hours a day, four times a week for two months to a similar number wearing cushioned inserts and found no significant difference between the two groups. Interestingly, people who strongly believed in magnets for pain relief reported less discomfort during the study, whether or not their insoles contained them. (*Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, September 2005)

Comment: While there's little evidence to support the use of magnets for foot pain, this research suggests the placebo response may explain reported benefits.

Soy May Lower Lung Cancer Risk. Eating soy foods, flax seeds, and other sources of phytoestrogens (plant estrogens) may reduce the risk of lung cancer in both smokers and nonsmokers. That's the finding of a Texas study in which some 3,400 people were asked about their eating habits. Those whose diets included the most phytoestrogens—also found in beans, broccoli, carrots, and spinach—were 46 percent less likely to develop lung cancer, compared to those who consumed the least of these compounds. While it's not clear how phytoestrogens may stave off lung cancer, previous studies suggest they may also reduce the risk of breast, endometrial, and prostate cancers. (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, September 28, 2005)

Comment: The best way to avoid lung cancer is to quit smoking or never start. Food sources of phytoestrogens have many health benefits, so it's good to eat more of them. 

Complementary Approaches for Weight Loss

You *still* have to eat less and exercise more to shed pounds and keep them off, but a number of complementary therapies have shown promise for aiding weight control. Several are mind-body approaches that can reduce stress levels and help control emotional eating. For instance, if you reach for food when you're feeling frazzled, try doing the Relaxing Breath exercise (described in my books and recordings) instead. By the time you finish, your craving may well have passed. I'll discuss other worthwhile measures, with help from James Nicolai, MD, medical director of the Franciscan Center for Integrative Health in Beech Grove, Indiana, who assists numerous overweight or obese patients with weight management.

Acupuncture. Research is mixed, but some studies suggest acupuncture can help promote weight loss and reduce hunger. Certain acupuncture points on the ear are often used to suppress appetite. There's also some evidence that acupuncture can help reduce anxiety, which may decrease emotional eating, and the technique's pain-relieving effects may allow overweight people with joint or muscle stiffness to be more physically active.

Bodywork. Massage and other hands-on therapies won't magically melt pounds, but like acupuncture, they can be very effective for joint or muscle pain that may discourage overweight people from exercising. Dr. Nicolai regularly recommends bodywork approaches such as myofascial release, neuromuscular therapy, and trigger point therapy to relieve musculoskeletal pain. Massage and other types of bodywork can also be great stress-busters.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy. Many people who lose weight regain much or all of it within a year or so because they resume old habits of overeating or being couch potatoes. Cognitive-behavioral therapy can teach you "relapse prevention" skills. A therapist may help you develop plans for eating and exercise, and ask you to keep a log of your food intake and activity levels. Also, you may learn how to cope better with food cravings, reduce emotional eating, manage social pressures to eat, and maintain motivation for lifestyle change. To find a therapist, visit nacbt.org or aabt.org.

Guided imagery. In a small, unpublished study of people on a standard weight-loss program, half also listened daily to a guided-imagery recording intended to promote weight loss, while the other half listened to relaxing music. The recording, which was developed by psychotherapist Belleruth Naparstek, included imagery designed to encourage appreciation for the body and safely speed up its metabolism. Those in the imagery

group lost an average of 8.5 pounds over eight weeks, while those in the music group lost an average of 4.25 pounds. To purchase the recording, called *A Meditation to Help You with Weight Loss*, visit healthjourneys.com or call (800) 800-8661.

Hypnotherapy. Research shows that adding hypnotherapy to cognitive-behavioral therapy for weight reduction can increase the chances of losing pounds and keeping them off. A hypnotherapist can teach you how to enter a trance, a state of heightened suggestibility, to reinforce motivation and help you change your behavior and attitudes about eating and physical activity. To locate a hypnotherapist, visit asch.net. Or consider listening to a six-CD audio program called *Lose Weight with Hypnosis* by psychologist Steven Gurgevich, PhD, and behavioral nutritionist Joy Gurgevich, both of whom work at the Program in Integrative Medicine. To order, visit tranceformation.com or call (866) 506-1700.

Mindfulness meditation. One reason people overeat is that they're not paying attention to what they're eating or how much. Who has not mindlessly downed quantities of popcorn or chips while watching a movie or staring at a television screen? Mindfulness meditation, in which you bring moment-to-moment awareness to bodily sensations and thoughts, can help you make more conscious food choices, so you're likely to slow down, eat less, and enjoy it more. Early research on mindfulness meditation to reduce eating binges looks promising, and a larger study is under way. To order a recording I made with mindfulness meditation expert Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, called *Meditation for Optimum Health*, visit drweilselfhealing.com or call (888) 337-9345.

Yoga. Practicing yoga regularly may help prevent middle-age spread. In a study of some 15,000 middle-aged people, those of normal weight who practiced yoga for 30 minutes at least once a week gained about three fewer pounds over a 10-year period than people who didn't do yoga. Overweight participants who practiced yoga lost about five pounds during that decade, compared to a 14-pound weight *gain* for those who were overweight and didn't do yoga (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, July/August 2005). Yoga may help control weight by cultivating body awareness, making people less likely to overeat. In addition, yoga can help those with excess pounds to improve their posture and balance, and it can ease chronic back pain, which is a common problem in overweight people. I recommend starting with a gentle beginner's yoga class if you're overweight or sedentary, rather than doing more strenuous styles such as Ashtanga ("power") or Bikram ("hot") yoga. **SP**

next issue

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